

What if?

Summary: What would have happened if Harry had asked Hermione to the Yule Ball first? How different would things have been between them and how would the wizarding world be affected by a simple question?

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter, J. K. Rowling does. I just borrowed the characters and the universe for my own purposes.

Chapter I

Dance Magic, Dance

Harry Potter walked back to the Gryffindor dorm with Professor McGonagall's words ringing in his head...

(Flashback)

"Potter. A word please."

Harry glanced at Ron who shrugged and walked out of the classroom from their newest...lessons. Harry approached the aged Professor and tried to figure out if he'd done something wrong as he waited.

"Potter. Traditionally, the champions open the ball

Harry was startled at this news and began to sputter a response to the statement.

"But Professor," He protested. "I don't dance."

She gave him a look that he could tell held a lot of amusement.

"Well...you do now."

(END Flashback)

So now Harry was wracking his brains to figure out just who he should ask and how much this was going to embarrass him as much as it would embarrass any potential dates. Sometimes, life sucks. He decided to just put the worry aside and made his way up to the

tower where he spotted Ron and Hermione working on their Transfiguration homework already. Ron glanced up and motioned for him to join them, which he did, pulling out his quill, course book, and parchment and plopped down next to them. Ron, being one to notice his friend's mood first, spoke up.

"What's wrong mate? You look like McGonagall just told you, you were related to Malfoy."

Harry felt his lips twitch into a smile at the statement.

"No. Nothing that horribly. She just wanted to inform me that it is a tradition for the champions to open the ball."

Ron cocked his head to the side.

"Well, that's not that bad then."

"Let me clarify for you. We open the ball with a dance. The champions and there dates."

Ron's expression changed immediately. He gave Harry a grave look.

"I'm sorry for the pain you will experience."

Harry rolled his eyes.

"Gee thanks. You're a real pal." He stated, his voice laced with sarcasm.

Ron simply shrugged his shoulders.

"It's what I do, mate. So, who you going to ask?" He asked.

Harry sighed and decided to answer his question.

"Well, the one I would have asked is already taken, though she probably would have said no. As for my first choice," At this point, he looked at Hermione who glanced behind her before looking at him with hope in her eyes, "It might be a little odd to ask her. I mean, she is a friend on mine. And a good one too."

He saw her face redden slightly as she looked back down at her scroll, a smile playing across her face. Ron, being the clueless guy he was, had no idea who Harry was talking about.

"Who is it?" He asked.

Harry faced him with a hint of disbelief, confusing Ron even more.

"Do we know her?" He asked again.

Harry frowned at how dense his friend was. But then again, Ron seemed to be slow to the uptake.

"Yes. All of us do."

Ron turned to Hermione who was still staring intently at her paper.

"Any idea who he's talking bout?" He asked her.

Hermione gave him a look that promised pain if he interrupted her again. Ron quickly looked away and back at his paper. Harry looked over at Hermione and saw a hint of hurt from her from Ron's statement. He would question her about that later. Now, he needed to just come up with four inches for his homework. Half an hour later, he was just finishing up his work as Hermione was rereading her's when Ron rose to his feet and stretched. Both Gryffindors looked up at him in surprise. He was never the first done and always asked Hermione to help him. Harry gave him a puzzled look.

"Well. I'm off." He said as he headed for the stairs.

Hermione grabbed his scroll and her eyes widened in shock.

"Ron. Your not even halfway done? How do you plan to have this finished by tomorrow afternoon?" She asked.

Ron grinned.

"That's where you come in. Read over that and finish it up for me, will you?"

Hermione glared at him and threw the scroll at his head. Ron instinctively ducked and his scroll sailed over his head and into the

fireplace. Ron cried out and dived toward the burning logs and pulled out what was left of his homework, which much. He turned to Hermione, anger on his face.

"Great. Now what am I supposed to do?"

"Your own damn work!" Hermione stated as she packed up her things.

"Because of you, I'll never get it done now!" He countered.

Harry watched in morbid fascination as the two started to go at it. He didn't even notice Fred and George appear behind him.

"What did ickie Ronnikins do now?" Fred asked.

"He tried to make Hermione do his homework."

George sighed.

"Ah...yes. Well...Ron has always been a few cards short of a deck."

Fred nodded his had in agreement as George leaned over to Fred.

"Bet you two Galleons he says something extremely stupid."

Fred looked at his twin in interest.

"How stupid?" He asked.

"She storms out."

Fred paused and nodded.

"Alright. I'll see your storm out and raise you tears."

George grasped his brother's hand.

"Your on."

They turned their attention back to the arguing fourth years.

"Maybe you'll learn your lesson if Professor McGonagall gives you detention." She snapped.

Ron's ears were turning very, very red as was his face.

"Oh yeah? And what lesson is that? That you're an old sourpuss? Or that you're an insufferable know-it-all? Maybe Snape is right about you!" He screamed.

All heads in the common room turned to face the Weasley that had basically spoken blasphemy inside the Gryffindor common room by stating that Snape was right about anything in general. Ron didn't seem to notice how quiet it was as Hermione's lip trembled before she turned and rushed out of the room and out the portrait hole. Ron humphed and turned to see people glaring at him.

"What are you looking at?" He snapped.

The crowd slowly looked away from him and went back to their assigned tasks. Ron looked back at Harry and slowly shook his head.

"I swear. Hermione's mental. Can't take a little insult."

Harry had had enough at this point and rose to his feet.

"Ron. You've done many stupid and arrogant things before, but this time you went too far. Hermione is our friend. Not some one for you to use to your own ends."

Ron gave him a questioning look.

"What do you mean? She always does our work for us." He stated.

Harry shook his head.

"No. I only have her proofread my stuff. You make her do yours. You're more worried about what people think of you and your image than your friends and your course work."

Ron looked like some one had slapped him.

"What are you talking about, mate? Of course I care about my friend. After all, not everyone is a friend of Harry Potter." Ron stated with a smirk.

Harry clenched his fists and took a breath to calm himself. He counted to ten before he packed his own bag up and put it over his shoulder.

"Ron. You'd better get your head out of your ass. I'm going to try to undo the damage you caused. And, until further notice, we're no longer friends." Harry stated as he headed out the portrait, hearing his shouted protests as it swung shut.

He looked back and saw the Fat Lady give him an approving nod.

"Very chivalrous, Mr. Potter. Now, I believe you have a friend to find."

Harry nodded and headed off in the direction he thought he'd find her in. He came around a corner and suddenly wished he hadn't. He'd run right through Nearly-Headless Nick and regretted it. The Ghost paused and looked to Harry before he gave the young wizard a slight smile.

"My, my, young Potter. In a hurry?" He asked.

Harry nodded.

"Yeah. I don't suppose you've seen Hermione, have you?"

Nick nodded. Or at least Harry thought it he did. With a wobbly head, it was hard to tell.

"Yes I did, actually. She was heading out to the lake. Something about a place to think, I believe she stated when I greeted her moments ago." Nick told him.

Harry thanked said ghost and hurried out to the lake and only needed a second to find who he was looking for. Sitting under a tree near the lake, sat Hermione, looking out across the lake. Harry walked over to her.

"Mind if I join you?" He asked as he got close enough.

She shook her head and Harry sat down next to her, seeing her hurt expression.

"Ron was just being an ass. You know him." Harry said as he too looked out across the lake.

"I'm never speaking to him again, so you can forget about talking me into apologizing to him." She stated bluntly.

"I wasn't going to. I told him off after you left. Let's just say, he will no longer be associated with Harry Potter anymore."

The brown haired girl looked at in with some shock.

"You did that?"

Harry nodded.

"Ron has been pushing his luck recently, trying to see how far he can push us before we snap. Today was the final nail in the coffin. Besides, I really don't like to see you upset."

Hermione smiled at him.

"At least someone does."

Harry cocked his head to the side in confusion.

"What do you mean?" He asked her.

She gave a watery chuckle.

"No one sees me as Hermione Granger, a girl. No. Everyone thinks like Ron does. They see me as Hermione Granger, Harry Potter's bookworm friend and Ron's ease why out of school." She said unhappily.

Harry pulled Hermione into a hug as she began to cry.

"Actually, I've noticed you since day one. Did you know that?" He asked her.

She looked up at him and shook her head. Harry smile.

"Yes. And if you didn't get my hint upstairs, I'll ask you now. Hermione Granger? You wanna go to the ball with me?" He asked her.

Hermione smiled but gave him a curious look.

"Harry, I really would like that, but I want to know why you'd ask me and not some one like Cho?" She inquired.

This only made the young wizard smile.

"Because I see Hermione Granger, a pretty and smart girl who has been my true friend since we stopped that troll in our first year. I see someone who won't take me for granted and try to yes my fame to get what they want. That's why."

Hermione tried to hide her blush as she shook her head.

"I'm not that pretty. My teeth are large and my hair is bushy. And I'm annoying."

Harry chuckled.

"True. You can be annoying at times, but the good kind. And I think your very pretty. Your teeth aren't large. Malfoy's got larger. And as for your hair? I'd like to think it's just untamable, like you." He said with a grin.

Hermione giggled and simply leaned back against him, both teens looking out over the lake as the sun began to sink beyond the horizon before they decided to head inside. They gave the password and entered the common room to see every eye in the room turn to them before returning to their work. Harry noticed Fred and George approached the two and had serious expressions on their faces.

"Harry. We want to apologize about Ron-

"For being a git to the both of you."

Harry waved them off.

"You two don't need to apologize. It's only Ron. Not your whole family."

Fred shook his head.

"No. What he did was an embarrassment to us as well as you."

"We do owe you an apology for our git of a brother."

Harry grinned as he came up with a rather brilliant idea.

"You two are forgiven on one condition."

Fred saw his smile and smirked as did George. Both twins looked to the other before their smirks grew even larger.

"Name it."

"Prank him without holding back."

The twins grinned so wide, it looked like their faces would split in half.

"Done."

-X-X-X-X-X-

The next morning found Ron in front of McGonagall, trying to explain why he didn't have his homework. He stuttered his response that Hermione had thrown it in the fire and called that nonsense since she felt that Hermione would not set another up for failure and had given Ron detention two nights back to back for failure to complete his assignment and for lying, even though Harry and Hermione both knew it was true, but felt that Ron needed to both be humbled and taught a lesson. Lunch found Harry and Hermione sitting side by side, just talking, getting to know each other a lot more than they previously had. And Harry thought it felt great to get to know his friend better, while Hermione enjoyed talking with the black haired boy to such an extent. Next lesson for the pair was...

"SILENCE!" A cold voice ordered.

The room quieted down as Professor Snape caught the classes attention.

"Now. Today we will be doing a simple antidote as a refresher. I dare to hope that you remember how to create one, or else your career in potions will be...short."

Malfoy and the other Slytherins smirked at the comment as Snape walked through the dungeon as the class began pulling out ingredients and other such items needed for brewing an antidote. Today's poison was a nasty one. It caused the body to lose control of all its muscles and forced them all to constrict at the same time. After thirty seconds in the body, it would constrict the airway and all the arteries and veins, bursting them inside the body. Most of the time, the being would be dead before the blood flow got interrupted from the pressure on the whole body. And once it reached the brain, it would actually begin to dissolve it. But the cure was a simple matter to construct because everyday potion ingredients that could be found anywhere were in it. But sadly, it was not even twenty minutes into potions that disaster struck. Neville had been trying desperately to get this one right but in his hurry, he had dropped in the frog liver too early and the potion had taken on a nasty green color instead of the light red it should have. He began to whimper and stir it quickly, trying to fix the problem when the potion literally exploded, spraying the room with the green concoction. Harry instinctively covered Hermione with his own body as the liquid sailed toward her. Harry felt it hit and heard a sizzling. He immediately yanked his robe off as the potion, or as he was now sure it was an acid, ate away his robes. Neville however, was not so lucky. He'd gotten a face full and was screaming furiously and Harry watched in horror as Snape quickly moved forward and gave a few waves of his wand and what Harry saw actually made him try not to laugh. Neville was missing his eyebrows, eyelashes, and half the hair on his head. Snape raised an eyebrow.

"I must say Longbottom. I'm actually rather surprised you made a hair removal potion that seemed to work so well. If it weren't for the fact that it was from your own blundering, I might actually have awarded you points for it." He said as he turned and headed to the front of the class and called forward those who had been hit.

Harry really felt his side threaten to explode as he saw a bald Malfoy rush to the front of the room trying to get his hair back. This day

couldn't get better. He turned around and saw Hermione giving him a puzzled look.

"What?" He asked.

She simply smiled and shook her head.

"Nothing. Just trying to figure you out."

"Maybe I'll let you?" He teased.

Hermione raised an eyebrow and crossed her arms across her chest.

"Really. I think I'll take you up on that." She countered.

Harry chuckled and went back to work.

-X-X-X-X-X-

The weeks went by quickly for the school as the Yule Ball quickly descended upon them. There wasn't much change except that Harry and Hermione had seemed to grow closer. And Harry found himself actually thinking about her, a lot. She seemed to be everywhere to him. But he didn't mind. He liked it. It was about two nights before the dance when Harry decided to take a chance. He and Hermione were sitting in the common room, he on a chair, her on the floor, leaning against his legs, absentmindedly petting Crookshanks, said cat purring like a lion, when he spoke up.

"Hermione?"

"Hm?"

"I was thinking. Maybe could consider the ball...a....a..." Curse his failing vocabulary.

Hermione however, was bemused. If she was hearing this right, Harry Potter was trying to ask her out. She settled on a sweet expression.

"Maybe we could what, Harry?" She asked innocently.

Harry mumbled his response and Hermione wanted to laugh as his face reddened, but felt it wouldn't be right.

"What did you say?"

Harry sighed and decided to just say it.

"If we could consider it a date."

Hermione smiled and rose to her feet, standing in front of him with humor in her eyes.

"And why would the Great Harry Potter want to date little, old, plain, me?" She teased, mocking curiosity.

Harry smiled.

"Because he has a thing for pretty girls who are bookworms."

Hermione seemed to think before she grinned.

"Alright. It's a date."

Harry grinned and felt better than he had in a while now.

-X-X-X-X-X-

The Yule ball arrived in no time, or so it seemed to Harry. He'd last seen Hermione three hours ago when she stated that she'd meet him at the Great Hall. So Harry got showered and dressed in his dress robes and headed down to the Great Hall to wait. He looked around and saw quite a few students looking at him in confusion. Diggory walked over to him.

"Harry? Where's your date? You have one, right?" He asked.

Harry nodded and turned to the stairs when he froze, his eyes wide and his mouth agape. Cedric looked over as well and his eyes widened too. Standing at the top of the steps, was Hermione. But it wasn't the Hermione Harry was used to. This one was beautiful. Her bushy hair was brushed and was now tamed. She had a light amount of make up dusting her features, not that she needed it. What caught his attention was her dress. She was dressed in robes

made of a floaty periwinkle-blue material and her smile was perfect. He felt his heart threaten to leap out of his chest as she walked over to him. Cedric grinned at Harry.

"I see you found one. Nicely done, Potter." He said as he headed back to Cho.

Hermione stopped in front of him, blush on her face as Harry simply took in her sight. It was a minute before he spoke.

"Wow." He looked at her numbly. "You look...wow."

Hermione giggled.

"Thank you. You look rather handsome yourself."

Harry blushed lightly and offered Hermione his arm which she took. Professor McGonagall gave the pair an amused look.

"I wondered when you two would pair up. Now, will the Champions and their partners come this way please."

Harry and Hermione fell in behind the others and noticed that Hermione was receiving various stares from everyone, and seemed uncomfortable with all the attention. Harry grabbed her hand and gave it a gentle squeeze, calming her down. She gave him a grateful smile. The rest of the students passed by them as they waited and Harry noted some interesting things. Like how Malfoy was unable to even say anything to Hermione as he walked by and the fact that Ron failed to notice or recognize who his date was. After what felt like an eternity, they entered the Great Hall and made their way to the Heads table and sat down. Harry ended up near Mr. Crouch. The meal eventually came after they figured out how to order through their plates. It was a great dinner with chatter rising throughout the room. Harry himself had been engaged into a conversation by Ludo Bagman about Quidditch for several minutes before Hermione caught his attention and gestured toward Ron with her head. Harry glanced over and saw a pissed look across the boy's face as he took in the fact that Harry was with Hermione at the Ball. Harry felt a twinge of guilt but pushed it aside as Dumbledore rose with a smile on his face. With a wave of his wand, several tables in the center of the Hall zoom to the walls, leaving a good sized area that Harry could only guess was the dance floor. A stage

had also appeared and a group of witches and wizards stepped up to the platform. Harry took his cue from Dumbledore and rose from his seat, as did the other champions and took Hermione's hand and they walked to the dance floor. Harry gave Hermione a bow that she returned and he took her right hand in his left and placed his right hand on her waist and they began. Funnily enough, they actually were the first to start as the other Champions started off slower. Harry didn't care. He knew he was the envy of most the males in the room and it made him grin. Hermione concentrated on him and tried to block out the fact that everyone was watching them. The first dance was for the Champions and Harry enjoyed it tremendously. After the song ended, they stopped and Harry gave her another little bow, making her smile and they faced the crowd with the Champions and all eight gave the crowd a little bow as well. The next song was as slow as the first, but Harry didn't care. It was defiantly a slow dance, based on the tempo and the words. Hermione rested her head on his chest as they slowly revolved on the spot, barely an inch between them. This was definatly a great night for him. The band began going for more up beat songs and in turn, Harry, while he was not the best dancer around, enjoyed sharing the floor with his date since she seemed to know exactly what she was doing, which he made a mental note to ask her how she did so well. After fifteen minutes, Hermione asked Harry if they could stop for a bit so she could cool off. He nodded and lead her to an empty table and left to get them drinks. It was at the punch bowl that he came across someone he'd have rather avoided.

"So you ditched me for a girl?"

Harry looked up to see an angry Ron glaring at him. Harry ignored him and grabbed two butter beers and turned to leave when he felt a hand grab his shoulder.

"Hey. I'm talking to you!"

Harry tried his best to control his temper.

"Let go of me or I'll hex your hand off." Harry threatened.

"What happened to you?" Ron demanded.

Harry gave him a cool look.

"No. I think you should be figuring out what happened to you. Now, if you don't mind, I have to get back to my date."

Harry left without looking back and walked over to Hermione. She was gently swaying to the beat of the music, looking out over the dance floor when he returned. Harry handed her the drink and she thanked him and took a sip, still looking at the others. Harry pulled his chair closer to her's and sat beside her, enjoying himself. It was after they had finished half their drinks that Hermione spoke up.

"Why did you ask me, Harry?" She asked without looking at him.

The young Potter looked at her in confusion.

"What?"

"Why did you ask me to come here and not someone else?"

Harry smiled.

"Because I was hoping to lay a bit of a thicker foundation beyond friendship with you."

This caused her to look at him with a happy expression.

"I knew that part. I just want to know what you see in me." She asked.

"I see a smart, beautiful young woman who is the most perfect person I have ever met. I'm very lucky to have you as a friend. I'd be an even luckier man if we became more."

She raised an eyebrow.

"Are you trying to persuade me?"

He shook his head.

"No. I wanted to tell you how I felt and I have no intention of making you choose anything. Your choice is your's and I will respect it. Even if we stay just friends, I could live with that. If we become more...I wouldn't complain."

Hermione smiled and nodded her head.

"I think we need somewhere a bit more private to talk."

Harry followed her lead and the pair left to the Gardens and found a nice secluded spot and sat down on one of the benches. Hermione gave him a nervous look.

"Harry. I have a confession. I've actually been hoping to go on a date with you for a while now. I...like you. More than a friend should."

This made him smile as he moved a strand of her hair out of her face and behind her ear.

"I've been thinking about that a lot lately. At least since last year that is. Remember when we had just escaped Professor Lupin after he transformed?"

She nodded.

"Well...I really liked how it felt to have you in my arms. Thing was, I was afraid I'd ruin what we had. And I thought you liked Ron." He confessed.

She snorted.

"He needs to learn how to treat his friends. He expects us to just drop everything and help him. No. The only reason I actually tried to be a friend to him was because of you. I knew that the three of us could be the best of friends, but he hasn't put any effort into it."

Harry silently agreed before he gave her a small smile.

"I guess I'm still nervous to ask, but I'll do it anyway. Hermione? Would you be...my...girlfriend?"

She gave him a startled look before it dissolved into a smile. She nodded her head.

"Yes. I'll be your girlfriend."

Harry gave a sigh of relief before he heard Hagrid. Harry looked around but didn't see him. Both of them stayed quiet as they heard him talking to Madam Maxine and decided it was best to leave them alone. Harry took her hand and headed inside where the band kicked up into a up beat song. Harry recognized it as 'I'll stop the World and melt with you' and chuckled. He never expected to hear a muggle song in a school for magic, but hey, tonight was full of surprises.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry and Hermione walked back to the common room, both tired, but smiling. The two headed for the stairs that separated the dormitories and stopped. Hermione turned to him, giving him a dazzling smile.

"Thank you for tonight, Harry. I had fun."

He grinned.

"Your welcome. Besides, I enjoyed hanging out with you, Hermione."

She blushed at him and started to go to her dorm when he caught her wrist. She turned to him, puzzled.

"I may be new to relationships, but I do know your forgetting to do something." He stated, smirking.

Hermione gave him a confused look, but it didn't stay there long as Harry leaned in briefly and gave her a short, chaste kiss on her lips making her eyes widen in shock before she closed them. After a moment, they pulled away, not because they wanted to, but because some one had entered the common room. Particularly, a set of twins.

"Aww...Look George. Our little Harry is all grown up." Fred teased.

George mocked wiping a tear from his eye.

"It seems like only yesterday we where helping him get his trunk on the train. Now look. He's got himself a girlfriend."

Fred looked to his twin in mock seriousness.

"You think we should give him the Talk?" He asked.

George faked thinking.

"Maybe we should."

Harry turned red as Hermione also blushed.

"Good night you two." She said with a bit of steel in her voice.

The twins laughed and congratulated the pair before disappearing to their own dorm. Harry shook his head and turned to Hermione with a smile.

"Well. I guess it's time for us to get some rest. Want to meet up for breakfast?"

She nodded her head and leaned in one more time for a second kiss before heading back up to her dorm, smile on her face. Harry was grinning like a mad man as he entered the dorm. Neville himself was there as well and saw the grin on Harry's face.

"What's got you so happy?" He asked.

Harry shrugged.

"Nothing too big Neville. I'm gonna change and get some sleep."

"Alright. Night Harry."

Harry bade the other boy good night and changed over to his sleep clothes and climbed into bed. His grin followed him off into sleep as his dreams turned to a certain brown haired girl.

Chapter II

We Found A Clue!

Harry awoke the next day, feeling great and happy. Something he hadn't felt in a long time. He got out of bed and gave a slight stretch before grabbing his clothes. He remembered that he and Hermione were going to go down to breakfast and he didn't want to be late. He glanced over at Ron's four poster and saw that the other boy had already left. Harry gave a shrug. Maybe he'd come around. Maybe not. Either way, Harry had much more important things to worry about. That being Hermione. He made it down to the common room with barely a minute to spare before they normally headed to breakfast. He sat down on a recliner and suddenly realized he hadn't told Sirius yet and could only picture the amount of teasing he would receive from his Godfather about this new development. Harry pushed those thoughts aside as he spotted Hermione coming down the steps, a simple sweater and jeans on with her brown hair pulled back into a ponytail. She gave him a small smile as he rose quickly and headed over to her.

"How'd you sleep?" He asked as he took her hand in his and they headed for the portrait hole.

"Very well. Thank you. And you? Did Ronald try to kill you in your sleep?" She asked.

Harry chuckled.

"No. I think he's still a bit sore about us. But, that really isn't important. I could care less what he thinks as long as he doesn't do anything stupid."

"Nah. He won't be doing-"

"Or saying anything stupid for a while."

Harry turned to see the Weasley twins walking toward them. Harry raised an eyebrow at them.

"Why's that?"

Fred gave Harry an apologetic look.

"We had to stop the stupid little git last night."

"Heard him making threats and trying to decided what hex to use on you. I must say though, I never thought he'd be creative enough to try to use a reducing charm in that manner." George stated.

Harry gave them a pleading look.

"Please tell me he didn't succeed."

Fred smiled.

"Nah. Stopped him with a leg binding curse."

George frowned.

"Yeah. Then the little idiot tried to get mouthy with us and tried to hex us."

"We used the ton-tongue charm on him. Madam Pomfrey has him in the infirmary now, trying to undo some of the more harsher hexes we used."

Harry gave them a stern look.

"He'll live. Trust me. Besides, mum would kill us if we killed Ron. Though she is not going to be too please with his behavior as of late." Fred stated.

George nodded and the twins bade the couple a good bye and entered the Great Hall. Harry watched them go and sighed as he and Hermione entered the Great Hall, side by side, but no longer holding hands. But the stares and whispers were enough to make them curious. Harry just shrugged and found a place for them to sit down and eat. For a several minutes, nothing bothered them until Neville sat down by them, looking nervous. Harry could see a daily profit in his hands and had an idea of what was going on.

"Let me guess? Rita Skeeter?" He asked.

Neville nodded and handed Hermione the paper.

"I think you two should see this."

Harry watched as Hermione read through it and saw her eye widen before she tore her eyes away from the paper.

"Hagrid is really...?"

Neville shrugged.

"I don't know. But that isn't the only article you should read."

Harry stopped Hermione before she could turn the page.

"What about Hagrid?" He asked.

She looked back at the paper and began to read.

"The Daily Prophet has now unearthed evidence that Hagrid is not - as he has always pretended - a pure-blood wizard. He is not, in fact, even pure human. His mother, we can exclusively reveal, is none other than the giantess Fridwulfa, whose whereabouts are currently unknown. Bloodthirsty and brutal, the giants brought themselves to the point of extinction by warring amongst themselves during the last century. The handful that remained joined the ranks of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, and were responsible for some of the worst mass Muggle killings of his reign of terror. '"

Harry felt his eyes about to popped out of his head at the shock.

"He's part giant?" He asked.

Hermione nodded.

"I guess so. I mean, it makes sense he's not pure blooded giant, but I never thought he was half giant. I thought he might have just gotten a hold of a bottle of Skele-gro when he was younger." She told him.

Harry felt that if he ever saw Rita again, then he would give her a piece of her mind. But Neville gave them a nervous look.

"That is not the only thing she wrote about. Look at the next page."

Hermione obliged and began looking through the article. He saw her eyes widen as anger showed on her face. Harry plucked the paper from her hands and looked at the title.

Harry Potter's New Love

Harry cocked an eyebrow and continued reading.

Last night at the Yule Ball, it was discovered that Harry Potter had asked his friend Hermione Granger to the Ball. We recently ran an article about the pair and the love triangle that seemed to include the Seeker for the Bulgarian Quidditch team, Victor Krum. But it took this reporter by surprise to see the pair appear at the dance hand in hand. Eventually, the two had retreated to a more secluded part of the gardens and began to talk. Harry, the charming young man he is, described Miss Granger as 'Pretty and smart, and the most perfect person he has ever met.' On one hand, we must applaud Mr. Potter, because he now has found true love at last. On the other, we must hope that Miss Granger's taste for famous wizards does not break our fragile hero's heart."

Harry laid the paper down.

"'Fragile Hero?' Am I made of porcelain?" He didn't get a response as a familiar trio appeared behind him.

Harry turned and saw the sneering face of Draco Malfoy.

"What do you want?"

Malfoy smirked.

"Just coming to saw congratulations Potter. You have finally hit an all time low. Taking a mud blood to the ball." He shook his head in mock sorrow. "What were you thinking?"

Harry rose from his seat and stepped forward toward Malfoy.

"Easy there, Ferret boy. I don't mind knocking you down a few pegs right now for what you just said."

Malfoy smirked.

"You wouldn't have the guts, Potter. Remember our first year?"

"Yeah. How you failed to show and sold us out to Filch? Coward."

Malfoy's smirk faltered.

"What did you say?"

Harry kept his face blank.

"I called you a coward. All you do is strike from the shadows and when people have their back turned. You wouldn't be able to fight on your own or with out your back up."

"How dare you? Your filthy blood traitor!" Malfoy snarled, pulling out his wand.

Harry already has his in hand, pointing it at Malfoy's face while Crabbe and Goyle had their's pointed at Harry as well. Malfoy smirked as he saw Snape hurrying over to them. The Slythrein Head glared at Harry.

"Put your wands away. Now."

Harry reluctantly put his wand away as did the other three.

"Starting fights now, eh Potter? Fifty points from Gryffindor and detention for the next week."

"Hold on there Snape. Seems you forgot the other three."

They turned to see Moody limping over to them, a hard look on his face. Snape gave him a bored look.

"I forgot nothing. Potter here is simple a trouble maker who looks for attention where ever it comes from."

"Not from what I saw. Malfoy there started this whole mess by insulting Potter's girlfriend. According to wizarding law, if Harry wants to take on Malfoy for Granger's honor, he can not be punished. What do you say, Potter? Fancy a duel with Malfoy here?" Moody asked, a twisted grin on his face.

Harry nodded. Snape looked up at the Headmaster who nodded, smiling. Snape sighed.

"Very well. It will be a non lethal duel. We can't have students killing themselves, now can we?"

"Agreed. So, lets take this outside, shall we?" Moody began limping to the door and they followed, as did the whole student body.

Moody lead them down to the Quidditch pitch and they all stood in the field with a large opening in the center for Harry and Draco. Dumbledore stepped into the middle of the field and spoke.

"The duel will be non lethal. Once one is rendered unconscious, or unable to continue in any form, the other will be declared the winner." He looked at them both before stepping back.

Moody limped to Harry and nodded his head.

"He'll mostly stick to offense. It suits his family style. Use the Shield Charm and retaliate when you have an opening. Snape will be telling him to use your own hot headedness against you, thinking of using how you rush into things as a way to win."

Harry nodded as Moody's eye rolled back into his head and looking at Snape.

"Just keep your wits about you and stay alert. Good luck Potter."

Harry nodded slightly and held his wand tightly. Malfoy sneered at him as the presented their wands before bowing.

"This is it Potter. Once I win, everyone will see how useless you are."

Harry gritted his teeth.

"We'll see about that."

Malfoy and Harry glanced to Dumbledore.

"Begin!" He commanded.

Malfoy struck first.

"Densaugeo!"

"Protego!"

The spell smashed into Harry's shield and flew back at Malfoy. The boy ducked and Harry saw his opening.

"Stupefy!"

Malfoy managed to duck and the spell hit Goyle full in the face. Malfoy spun around and aimed his wand back at Harry.

"Impedimenta!"

Harry used his seeker reflexes to avoid the spell.

"Expelliarmus!" The scarlet colored spell caught Malfoy unaware and his wand was torn from his hand.

Harry didn't hesitate to finish the duel.

"Stupefy!" Malfoy's eyes widened as it struck him in the chest, throwing him to the ground.

Around them, cheers erupted from the Gryffindors and boo's and hisses from the Slytherins. Harry didn't care as he left the pitch with Hermione and the rest of his house, leaving a bemused Dumbledore wondering just how much more Harry had improved without anyone noticing.

"It maybe time to start my plans a bit earlier than expected." The headmaster thought.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry sat frustrated as he tried yet again to understand what the screeching and wailing was about. Harry closed the egg and rubbed his eyes. It had been hours since he'd sat down, trying to figure it out. He decided to go for a walk and left a note for Hermione before he headed out. It wasn't long until he came across Cedric who greeted him.

"Hey. Harry. Been trying to find you since this morning. Nice duel by the way. Malfoy had it coming."

Harry nodded.

"What can I do for you?" He asked the older boy.

Cedric looked around nervously before he spoke.

"You figured out the egg yet?"

Harry shook his head.

"No. I can't figure out how to decipher the wailing."

Cedric grinned.

"I guess I get to pay you back for the dragons. Try taking a bath with it and just...mull things over."

Before he could say more, he hurried over to some Hufflepuffs that happened to be looking for him and bade Harry good bye, leaving him even more confused. He shrugged his shoulders and headed back to the common room and found Hermione sitting in one of the recliners, not really paying attention. Harry grinned and slipped behind her, chin on her shoulder, looking down at the book she was reading.

"What are you reading?"

Hermione jumped a little from fright before smiling.

"Funny, Harry. I was actually reading something not school related for once, if you must know."

Harry came around and sat on the stool next to her chair and frowned.

"I ran into Cedric. He told me to take a bath with the egg. I don't understand why."

Hermione looked puzzled.

"But why would you need a bath to...understand..." Her eyes seemed to widen in realization. "Of course!"

Harry gave her a confused look.

"Mind telling me what you just figured out?"

She smiled at him.

"Merpeople."

Harry still looked confused, but Hermione told him she'd explain later and dragged him to the Bathroom Cedric had given him the password to. Hermione filled the large tub that seemed like a swimming pool, and gave him a shy grin.

"What?" He asked.

"I forgot a swim suit, unless you'd like me to join you nude?"

Harry blushed and grinned at the thought. That wouldn't be horrible. She saw his grin and giggled.

"Tell you what. I'll go to one end, and you to another."

"If we fill it with bubbles, then we won't have to worry about that." He countered.

Hermione thought for a moment and agreed. It only took a few minutes to fill and the two teens turned away from each other and began to undress with blushes. Harry couldn't help but sneak glances at Hermione and couldn't believe how attractive she was. He slipped into the tub as she did, though she seemed to keep some distance between them, unsure how to go about the egg. Harry gave her a curious look.

"What now?" He asked.

"Put it under water and see if you can understand it."

Harry grabbed the egg and did as he was told and glad that the water was cloudy and he couldn't see anything beyond a foot from

him. But that didn't concern him as he began to hear a voice from it. It was a song!

Come and seek us where our voices sound,

We cannot sing above the ground,

An hour long you have to look

To recover what we took.

But past an hour, the Prospects black.

Too late, it's gone, it won't come back.

Harry came up for air and grinned at Hermione.

"You're a genius. Here, you listen to it." He said as he handed her the egg.

Hermione turned away from him, still red in the face and went under as well, listening to the egg. She came up after she had heard it and frowned as she turned to Harry.

"But what does it mean?" she asked.

"It sounded like they were going to take something from me, but it would have to be important for me to chase after it. But where are they?" He mused.

"The Black lake. It's the only place close enough to hold the event."

"So they are going to take something from me and put it at the bottom of the lake."

Hermione nodded.

"And it have to be pretty important to you for you to chase after. I know you wouldn't go diving for you Firebolt."

Harry nodded.

"True. Only thing I can think of is...you."

Hermione blushed darker and smiled at him.

"That's sweet Harry. But do you really think I'm what they'll take from you?"

"Sure as hell won't be Ron. Besides, it would have to be a hostage because no one is that attached to their stuff that they'd go to the bottom of a lake to get."

Hermione had to agree that it made sense. The pair eventually got out of the tub and dried off and dressed quickly and headed back to the common room, talking to each other about the task.

"But how am I supposed to breathe under water for an hour?" He asked as they plopped down on the recliners.

Hermione frowned.

"I don't know. There are spells but we aren't at the level to use them yet." She stated, frowning.

It was then that Neville seemed to appear out of thin air.

"I think I can help you with this one, Harry. Here." He said as he handed Harry a herbology book.

Harry looked at the top of the page and his eyebrows knitted together as he read.

Gillyweed: when eaten, this plant causes the user to grow gills and webbed feet and fingers, thus becoming able to breathe and swim underwater, for approximately an hour, depending on whether the user is surrounded by fresh or salt water.

Harry looked up at Neville in awe.

"Neville, you just saved me a lot of trouble."

Neville smiled and took the book back and went on with reading. Hermione gave him a questioning look.

"What did you find out?"

"You know where we can get a hold of Gillyweed?" He asked her.

"Yes. Professor Snape keeps some in his private stores. Why..." Her voice trailed off as she finally understood where he was going. "Neville is a genius." She stated.

Harry nodded.

"Now, how to get it from Snape." He muttered.

They stayed up as the common room cleared out, discussing plans on how to get into the private store when Harry happened to glance at the fireplace and did a double take. Hermione followed his gaze and her eyes went wide. Sitting in the fire place as the grinning face of Sirius Black.

"Well, hello you two."

Harry and Hermione dropped down in front of the fireplace.

"Sirius. It's good to see you again."

"Likewise Harry. Hermione. It's nice to see you again."

Hermione gave him a small smile as the man looked back at Harry with amusement.

"Seems like you followed Potter tradition and fell for a bookworm, eh Harry?" He said with a chuckle.

Hermione blushed as Harry scowled at Sirius. The man looked at Hermione.

"I suppose you're the witch of your year, aren't you?"

She nodded in response, making the man chuckle as he looked back at Harry.

"Like father like son. Lilly was the witch of our year. Seems you've got you father's taste in women, yet you seem to have more luck with pretty girls than he did." He said with an amused look on his face, causing Hermione to blush.

"Now's not the time to be discussing who I date, Sirius. Right now, we have to find away to break into Snape's private stores."

Sirius gave him a curious look.

"Why's that?" He asked.

"I need Gillyweed for the next task. It takes place at the bottom of the lake."

"I think you'd better bring me up to speed."

And Harry did, explaining just what they had figured out, along with telling him the message verbatim. Black nodded his head.

"Your right, but I think the hour is a time limit. Dumbledore won't allow a student to die because you were too slow to reach them. So don't play the hero Harry and try to rescue everyone."

"Alright. But first we have to solve the Gillyweed problem."

Sirius smiled.

"It's not a problem. I can get some sent to you by next week."

Harry felt relief wash over him.

"Thanks, Sirius. That takes a load off my mind."

Black nodded but his face turned serious as he remembered something.

"Say. How is it both of you seem to smell of the same mixture of scents?"

He saw the two teens turn red and waited patiently.

"How did you know that?" Harry asked.

"I'm a dog in my animagus form. I've got a few heightened sense, including smell. Now, do you want to answer?" he asked.

Harry quickly explained what happened, but didn't mention that they both were nude. He let Sirius think that he and her were in swim ware. This seemed to satisfy the elder man.

"Very well. I do suppose you never had the talk from your Aunt and Uncle. Though that task falls to me now."

He saw Harry's look of horror and chuckled.

"It won't be tonight, so calm down. I just want you two to be careful. Your not ready for the next step. Now you two need to get some rest. It's late. Harry, look for my post next week. Hermione. Keep him from doing anything reckless, please? Lord knows I can only do so much."

Hermione smiled and nodded her head. Sirius bade them good night, leaving the pair to head off to bed.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry and Hermione spent the next few weeks making strategies and such on how to use the Gillyweed to the greatest effect, including research into Merpeople. Harry would have just rather tried to avoid them, but knew it would be impossible to do so. The weeks seemed to drag by as the 24th neared. Only good thing was he received a letter from Sirius, asking for the date of the next Hogsmeade weekend. Harry jotted down the date Hermione gave him and sent the owl back. Hermione wanted to do some more research, but Harry told her that they had done all the research they could. She reluctantly agreed and they headed out to the same tree Harry had found her at over two months ago. Harry sat down with Hermione next to him. He pulled her close to him as she rested her head on his shoulder.

"Just make sure you hurry and find me, okay?"

"I promise."

Harry wasn't sure what happened next, but he found himself in the midst of a kiss with Hermione. She seemed to want more and had knocked him on his back. She pulled away and smirked.

"I have you right where I want you, Mr. Potter." She stated, smiling at him.

Harry grinned.

"And where is that, Miss Granger?" He asked, tenderly creasing her cheek.

She seemed to melt into his touch and closed her eyes, a smile on her face.

"With me." She stated.

Harry rolled over and put Hermione on her back, causing her to become shocked by the change, but quickly giggled and the two began a wrestling match that Harry lost, only because he let her.

"Ha. I win." She stated with a smirk.

Harry chuckled.

"Maybe I like letting you be dominant occasionally."

She raised an eyebrow before shaking her head and giving him another kiss, though this one was different. He hadn't expected her to shoot her tongue into his mouth, though he enjoyed it and began wrestling with her tongue, making her moan lightly at this new sensation. They stay that way for a few minutes before a short cough caught their attention. The two broke apart and saw Fred and George looking at them with mild amusement.

"Make out by the lake? Hmm...not a bad idea. Thanks Harry." Fred stated, grinning.

The pair blushed and Harry recovered first.

"What you guys want?" He asked.

"McGonagall sent us to find Hermione. Only way we could avoid detention for our latest prank on Ron." George stated.

Harry raised an eyebrow.

"What did you do?" He asked.

Fred grinned evilly.

"Remember how he wanted to use the shrinking charm on you?"

Harry nodded.

"Yeah."

George mirrored his twin's grin.

"Let's just say the only retort of tweezers and a magnifying glass now hold true to our dear brother."

Harry's jaw dropped as Hermione burst into laughter before they reminded her that McGonagall wanted to speak to her. Giving Harry a quick kiss, she headed back to the school with the other two. Harry stayed where he was for a little while before heading in. He waited in the common room for over an hour before writing her a note stating that he went to sleep. He just hoped she wasn't in trouble for helping him.

-X-X-X-X-X-

The next morning, Harry waited for Hermione but she never showed. He stopped Lavender Brown and asked her where she was, but she didn't know, neither did any of the other fourth year girls. Harry headed down to the lake by himself, confused and waited patiently for the event to start, hoping Hermione was okay. He had a feeling that she was already at the bottom of the lake, waiting for him. Bagman came and gave Harry's shoulder a quick squeeze and returned to the judges' table; he pointed his wand at his throat as he had done at the World Cup, said, "Sonorus!" and his voice boomed out across the dark water toward the stands.

"Well, all our champions are ready for the second task, which will start on my whistle. They have precisely an hour to recover what has been taken from them. On the count of three, then. One... two... three!"

The Whistle blew and Harry stuffed the Gillyweed in his mouth and swallowed, diving into the water as he felt a piercing pain on the side

of his next. He covered the sides, and closed his eyes, waiting for the pain to pass. After a moment he opened his eyes and saw that his hands were webbed. A quick glance confirmed that his feet looked like flippers. He took in a deep breath and felt his new gills working and kicked off. He knew where the Merpeople would be. During the research they did, they had discovered that they tended to make their cities at the deepest points in lakes. So Harry headed off to where he figured the deepest point was. It wasn't too long before he heard them. Harry put on more speed and finally came to their city. He slowed and made his way to the center, noticing the stares he was receiving and ignored them. He made his way to the city center and saw four beings anchor to the lake bed by ropes and locks. He saw Hermione, Cho, a miniature version of Fleur, and another girl from Hogwarts he was sure was on the Hufflepuffs' Quidditch team, but he couldn't be sure. He really didn't care as he made his way to Hermione. He pulled out the pocket knife Sirius had sent him for Christmas and managed to cut the rope. He grabbed her around her waist and headed for the surface. He saw Cedric pass by him and the older boy flash him a thumbs up that he returned. But, he didn't get far before the Gridylows ambushed him. He'd strayed too close to the seaweeds in the lake and the little monsters got a good grip on him. Harry then did the only thing he could think of. He pushed Hermione toward the surface and away from the Gridylows and pulled out his wand and began sending jets of hot water at them. They didn't like that too much and swarmed him, pulling him down. He could feel the Gillyweed's effects slowly disappear. He clamped his mouth shut as the pain on the sides of his neck signaled the disappearance of his gills. He saw his vision blackening and did the only thing he could think of. He pointed his wand straight up.

"Ascendio!"

He felt himself shoot out of the water and landed rather painfully on the wooden platform. The crowd roared as he came up. Harry looked over and saw Cedric grinning at him. Damn. He coughed up some water as the Headmaster placed a towel over him, telling Mister Crouch that he was fine. He also saw that Krum had also finished and Fleur was also on the platform as well. Hermione hurried over to him and hugged him.

"Harry! Alright? You must be freezing!" She hurried and draped another towel over him.

"Hermione. Owe." He said as he winced.

"Little buggers did a number on me." He thought as she hugged him.

"You did great Harry." She said, pride in her voice.

"I finished last, Hermione." He stated flatly.

Hermione pulled his head down and kissed the top of it, making him wince again.

"Next to last. Fleur never got past ze Gridylows." She said with a smile in a French accent.

Harry smiled as Dumbledore tried to quiet the crowd. Madam Pomfrey was also there, passing out pepper up potions, that seemed to instantly warm him. Once the crowd was quiet, Ludo Bagman spoke.

"Ladies and gentleman. We have reached a decision on the scoring. Fleur Delacour demonstrated excellent use of the Bubble Head charm, however, she failed to return with her hostage. We award her, twenty-five points."

There were polite applause at this point as the Champion in question was hugging her sister after the Merpeople had returned her.

"Viktor Krum used an incomplete form of Transfiguration, which was nevertheless effective, and was third to return with his hostage with in the time limit. We award him third place with forty points."

The Drumstrang students cheered loudly as Krum raised his hand.

"Cedric Diggory also used the bubble head charm to great effect. He was first to return with his hostage with in the time limit. We award him forty-five points."

The Hufflepuffs cheered loudly as Cedric grinned and waved at his fellow Hufflepuffs.

"Mr. Potter used Gillyweed to it's full effect and returned just after the time limit expired. However, we have learned that he was indeed the first to reach the hostages and would have returned first if not for stalling a Gridylow ambush and making sure his hostage got to safety. We here by award him second place for sheer outstanding commitment to his peers. We award him...forty five points."

The Gryffindors cheered loudly as Bagman finished. Bagman told the champions that they would be told what the next task was soon enough and that they had a chance to relax and recover. Something Harry planned to do. Now, he only had to figure out who it was that had put his name in the goblet. He had a funny feeling something bad was going to happen during the Third task. But right now, he was more preoccupied with his Girlfriend who was dragging him up to the Castle. Something about alone time. Harry just grinned, knowing just what she was talking about. He could honestly say, a broom closet never looked so inviting.

I'm actually rather surprised by the feed back. I guess I have decent writting skills. And as for why i seem to spread it out, I just can't seem to find anywhere else to end the chapter. But, I glad you guys like this story. I'll try to update at least twice a week, maybe more if I can.

Chapter III

Wishful Thinking

Harry groaned as he felt something hit his head. The dark haired boy lifted his head and looked toward a blurry Neville.

"What?" He asked.

"Breakfast time, Harry. You coming?" Neville asked.

Harry dropped his head back into the pillow and moaned into it.

"Harry James Potter. I hope you don't expect me to walk down to the Great Hall and have breakfast alone?"

Harry smiled as he looked over toward the stairs and saw Hermione grinning at him. At least, it looked like a grin. The boy grabbed his glasses and put them on and rolled out of bed and saw Neville's eyes avert and walk out of the room as Hermione smirked at him, a bit of red dusting her face.

"I'd put you 'wand' away Harry."

Harry gave her a confused look before looking down. His eyes widened and he instinctively cover himself, even though nothing was showing and frowned at her.

"Hermione Granger." He said in a mock scolding tone.

"Harry Potter. Now that we have that figured out, let's get some breakfast." She turned and headed for the stairs before stopping and smirking again. "And here I thought 'wood' wasn't a morning person."

Harry threw a pillow at her that she ducked and headed down the stairs, laughing loudly. Harry just chuckled and dressed himself quickly, meeting Hermione down in the common room. She still had the same smirk on her face as she looked over him. Harry rolled his eyes and took her hand and the pair walked down to the Great Hall, not even paying attention until...

"Stupefy!"

"Protego!" Harry called with out hesitation.

He looked back and saw a livid Ron pointing his wand at Harry.

"What the hell do you think your doing?" Harry demanded.

Ron didn't say anything as a smirk appeared. It was then that Harry saw his eyes. Glazed over. He stepped between Ron and Hermione and locked eyes with Ron.

"Hermione. Go get Dumbledore. Ron's been Imperiused. I'll hold him here."

"Harry-" She started to protest, but Harry cut her off.

"Go!" He screamed as Ron raised his wand.

"Confringo!"

"Incendio!"

The two spells smashed into each other and exploded in the center of the Hall, leaving a massive burn and cracks on the ground beneath it. Harry stumbled back, but Ron managed to recover faster.

"Defodio!"

Harry ducked the gouging spell and looked in time to see it take the head off of one of the statues in the corridor. Harry gripped his wand tightly as he rose back to his feet, preparing himself.

"Furnunculus!"

"Finite Incantatem!"

Harry watched as his spell was nulled and looked up to see Ron preparing to send another.

"Lacarnum Inflamarae!"

Harry saw a rather large fireball flying toward him and ducked it, letting it smash into the wall behind him. He heard footsteps fast approaching and decided to take his chances.

"Stupefy!"

"Protego!"

Harry watched as his spell collided with the shield and rebounded into a wall. Ron gave a dark grin.

"Crucio!"

Harry felt as if his very bones were on fire as he spasmed from the pain, gasping for breath after a moment under it. Ron laughed.

"Ah yes. I see now. One most indeed enjoy to cause someone pain, little baby Potter." His voice sounding oddly hollow as he spoke, as if the words did not belong to him. Harry struggled to his feet before another Cruciatus curse as Dumbledore rounded the corner with several students and a few instructors.

"Time to crush you for good, Potter. Say good bye to your precious Mud Blood."

Harry looked to Hermione as she simple was rooted to the spot in fear. Time seemed to slow down as everyone moved slowly. Dumbledore was already pulling out his wand, but Harry could see that the shock of Ron saying what he had, had given the other time to complete the spell. Harry rose to his feet and moved in between Ron and Hermione, arms spread wide, covering Hermione from Ron.

"Avada Kedavra!"

Harry watched the green jet slice through the air and felt it smash into his chest. He let out a grunt before he fell backwards. Hermione watched in disbelief as Harry dropped to the ground. She felt her heart shatter as the boy landed. Her grief was the only thing she knew. But Dumbledore was still a factor, and became Harry's unofficial second, stepping forward.

"It was foolish of you to do that..." He stated clamly, speaking to whoever it was controlling Ron.

Ron snarled and let loose another killing curse at Dumbledore. The old headmaster created a silver shield that absorbed the curse before sending a silent stunning spell at Ron, effectively knocking the puppet out. Dumbledore checked him and was satisfied he was unconscious. When he turned to Harry, what he saw broke his heart. Hermione was holding him, crying as McGonagall shook her head, tears in her eyes. Behind them, they could see the others looking on in disbelief. Even Malfoy couldn't believe that his rival was dead and gone. But when his eyes meet Snape's he saw...regret. Regret at treating Harry as if he was his father reborn. The Headmaster made his way over to the grief stricken girl.

"No. Not Harry. Please no!" She sobbed.

Everyone in the corridor looked at her with pity and sadness. Hermione ran a finger across his cheek, tears running down her face.

"You promised you'd never leave me. You promised." She whispered.

Albus Dumbledore lowered his aged body down to her level and looked at her sadly.

"They say that love is an eternal thing. That it's inside us, binds us to the world and those few we allow in. Harry loved you enough to protect you with his life. It seems the second task was right. You are the one thing he could not live with out."

Hermione's lip trembled as she looked back down at Harry, tears still flowing. She leaned in and kissed him once more, pulling away sobbing as others in the crowd began to cry as well, mostly Gryffindors, as Dumbledore for the first time in his life, had no idea what to say.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry found himself in a peculiar position. He was naked. Not just that, but he was in a bright white room. He wasn't disturbed by being naked, but it felt wrong at the moment to be parading around in his birthday suit. Almost as if by thought, he was suddenly clothed in his Hogwarts robes. Around him, he saw the room waver before solidifying into Kings Cross station. Curious as he was, Harry looked

around and saw a few strange things. One, what appeared to be a being with raw, blistered skin and a pained whine made him both want to comfort it and yet stay as far away as possible.

"Yes. Gruesome, isn't it?"

Harry looked around and saw a wizard smiling at him a little ways away. The man had long black hair, and an eye patch over his right eye. He wore a simple leather jacket with dark brown trousers, a tan vest over a pressed collared shirt with a simple red tie. His beard, while no where with in the standards set by Hagrid or Dumbledore seemed to complete the picture. Harry could see a familiar twinkle in his green eyes as he looked at Harry. The boy walked over and sat beside the man who pulled out an ancient pocket watch before putting it away and turning to Harry.

"Well, my boy. We have plenty of time to talk. What do you want to discuss?"

Harry returned his smile.

"Where are we?"

The man chuckled.

"Well. I do believe this is Kings Cross. It has changed substantially since I last visited it." He said, looking around.

Harry watched the man look around before he asked his next question.

"Who are you?" Harry asked.

The man looked back at him and grinned.

"My name is Professor Godric Gryffindor. But you can call me Godric. I haven't taught anyone in over 800 years." He stated with a grin.

Harry felt that he should have been surprised, yet he wasn't. The boy simply looked around again.

"So this is Limbo."

"More or less. It's what you want it to be."

Harry sat in silence for what felt like an eternity before he spoke.

"What now?" He asked.

"Well, that depends on you." Godric told him, giving him a calculating look.

Harry raised an eyebrow.

"What do you mean?"

The man pointed to a scarlet red steam engine that was simply sitting on the tracks.

"You have two choices Harry. You can simply get on the train and ...move on, leaving behind all your worries and all the problems of Earth. Or, you can simply walked out the front door over there and return to life. Your choice."

Harry looked at the train before looking at the exit and smiling.

"I have a few things I still need to do before I can even think of carrying on."

Godric smirked.

"I knew you wouldn't let me down. After all, only the true Heir of Gryffindor would have been able to pull my sword from the sorting hat. By the way, is that infernal head warmer still singing those hideously written songs?"

Harry chuckled.

"He has gotten better."

Godric smirked.

"At least he's had a thousand years to practice. Now. Do you have any other questions before I send you back?"

"Yeah. A couple. One, why am I being offered a choice?"

"Ah, yes. Well, you see, there are two possibilities from this point. You die, Voldemort returns and terrorizes the Wizarding World and the Muggle World, destroying all and killing all those you hold dear. That is not the favored outcome. Two, you return and you continue to fight him. And possibly save all who matter to you and both worlds."

Harry cocked an eyebrow.

"What do you mean 'possibly'?"

"I'm not going to tell you if you succeed or not because many important events still have yet to happen. Now, any other questions?"

"Yeah. Why am I in limbo and not in heaven or somewhere like that talking to some one else? Why hold me between worlds?"

Gryffindor simply looked at the disgusting creature.

"That, Harry, is part of Voldemort. When he attacked you parents and had his curse back fired, his weakened soul latched a piece of it onto you. Hence your parseltongue abilities. And since it was two souls in one body, and yours belonged in the body, your held here to decide."

Harry pondered this and shrugged his shoulders.

"It makes sense. So...what now?"

"Well, you still have a choice. Do you want to continue on?"

Harry thought back on his life, every moment. He watched in bitter resentment as he watched how he was treated by the Dursleys and everyone else. However, he stopped when he came upon a particular memory. It was one of the days he caught Hermione alone, in their third year. She was humming and dancing by herself. He thought she was beautiful. Then it clicked. She was still alive. Harry smiled at Godric and rose. The older man stood as well.

"You decided?" He asked.

Harry nodded and pointed to the doors.

"I have someone who I plan on spending forever with back there."

Godric chuckled.

"Ah...yes. Miss Granger. I must say, you do seem to have more luck with the ladies than most males in our line. Very well. Allow me to walk you to the exit then."

The pair made their way to the doors.

"There just one more thing I need to know." Harry said.

"What's that?"

"Why me? Why did Voldemort choose me?"

Godric sighed.

"As such, I cannot tell you. I wish I could, but I am bound by rules. However, ask Albus. As scatterbrained as he can be at times and damn confusing to talk to, he has the answers. Now, Harry. I must bid you farewell. And remember...help will always be given at Hogwarts for those who seek it."

Harry looked back at him before he walked through the doors. He had a sudden falling sensation before it stopped. It was at this moment that he heard sobs. He could feel a pair of arms around him. He slowly cracked open an eye and looked up into the surprised faces of Albus Dumbledore and Hermione Granger.

"What?" He asked.

Dumbledore chuckled as Hermione lost it and pulled him into a tight hug, crying in happiness as Harry looked around in confusion.

"What just happened?"

Dumbledore smiled.

"Seems your two for two Harry."

Harry gave him a puzzled look.

"Young Mister Weasley was under the effects of the Imperious curse and dueled you. I must say, it must have been spectacular based on the damage caused."

Harry grinned as he held Hermione close, her tears still falling as the teachers herded the students back to class.

"During your duel, he attempted to kill young Miss Granger with a killing curse. You stepped in front of it, willingly taking the curse in her place, saving her."

Harry nodded and stroked her hair as she continued to hold onto him for fear of him disappearing.

"However, that does not explain your return from the dead. Care to enlighten an old wizard?" He asked.

Harry looked around and Dumbledore took the hint.

"How about we retreat to my office?"

Harry agreed and the three headed for the Headmasters office while McGonagall took Ron to the medical wing.

-X-X-X-X-X-

"So you meet Godric Gryffindor? Fascinating." Dumbledore stated.

"Yeah. He also told me that I had a bit of Voldemort's soul in me."

He saw Dumbledore's face become grave.

"Then it is as I feared. He has indeed made Horcrux."

Harry gave him a curious look.

"Horcrux sir?"

"Dark Magic Harry. Dark Magic indeed. I must do more research into this, so for now, don't worry about it. As is, I think you should go to the medical wing for Madam Pomfrey to look you over."

"But Professor-" Harry started, but was cut off, not by Dumbledore, but by Hermione.

"Oh, no you don't Harry James Potter. Your going straight there even if I have to drag you there, kicking and screaming."

Harry was taken aback by the intensity in her eyes as Dumbledore chuckled.

"Might I suggest the body-bind jinx as with the levitating charm Miss Granger?"

Hermione smiled at him.

"Thank you for the idea sir."

-x-x-x-x-x-

Easter arrived quickly for Hogwarts, with most of the students planning on going home for the holidays. Today, Harry could be found lounging around the common room, reading through a few Quidditch books he had as Hermione came bounding down from the girls dorm. Harry put his book down and let Hermione plop down and lean against him, his arm around her.

"Going home for Easter?" He asked.

She nodded, smiling. Harry forced a smile in return. Truth be told, he wasn't looking forward to spending the holiday alone, but he wasn't going to stop her from seeing her family. She seemed to notice how forced it was and giggled at him, making him raise an eyebrow.

"Your invited too. Mummy and Daddy want to meet you."

"They want to meet me?" He asked in disbelief.

Hermione nodded.

"They are really curious as to who the boy is dating their little princess."

Harry groaned.

"Great. I've faced Voldemort, dementors, dragons, and a whole odd assortment of random magical creatures, capable of killing me, and yet the idea of meeting your parents scares me more than all that combined."

Hermione frowned.

"It won't be that bad. Please, come, just for me?" She asked, giving him a small pout.

Harry sighed in defeat and agreed, making Hermione cheer in happiness before pulling him into a kiss.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry Potter. The Boy Who Lived. Faced Voldemort his first year and survived. Faced trolls, huge spiders, werewolves, dementors, and about a dozen other things that wanted him dead and he had challenged them without a second thought. Yet here he was, swearing bullets as Jack Granger fixed his gaze on Harry.

"So. Your Harry. It's nice to meet you."

Harry took his offered and shook it briefly.

"Pleasure to meet you as well, sir."

Hermione watched from the sidelines, amused as her Mother walked forward.

"Hello, Harry, dear. I'm Miranda Granger, Hermione's mother."

Harry shook her hand as well.

"Nice to meet you too, ma'am."

"Such a polite young man." Miranda mused as Jack looked at Harry with a calculated look.

Harry tried to ignore the eyes of her father and helped Hermione load her things into the car, even going as far as to close the door for Miranda before he himself entered. The ride was quiet and uneventful as they made their way to the Grangers' home. Harry was rather surprised at the simple two story home, with fresh white paint and a very nice garden and front lawn. The four people in the car exited with Hermione dragging Harry along with her upstairs with their trucks to show him the guest room. He thanked her and pushed his trunk into the room, and after a moment of looking around, he opened Hedwig's cage and let the snowy white owl come out of her cage and settle on the dresser in the room. It was only ten minutes before he heard a knock on the door and saw Jack in the doorway. Harry jumped up and looked at the man.

"Harry. Might I have a word with you?" He asked.

Harry knew it wasn't a question. The boy followed Jack downstairs and the pair entered Jack's private study where they both sat down and Harry began to feel uncomfortable.

"Harry. I must say, that this is a first for me. While I knew that I'd meet a guy who wanted to date my daughter, I must confess that I don't really know what to say."

Harry nodded his head in understanding.

"I also know what it is like to be on other end of this conversation. So I know how nervous you must be right now. But...Hermione likes you. She's talked about you for years now, and I have learned just what kind of person you are. I know you'll keep her safe, but know this. If you break her heart, I'll break your legs. We clear?"

Harry nodded, agreeing with him.

"Good. Now, I also know a bit about your history from the books Hermione showed us. I know that it must have been hard to grow up with out parents and we were told how horrible your relatives treated you. But while you are here, you're a guest. Understand?"

Harry again nodded, making the man smile.

"Good. Now, let's go get some dinner before the women folk think I've run you off."

-X-X-X-X-X-

The days for the Easter Holiday were passing by enjoyably as Harry spent time with Hermione and her family. They were really nice people, and they wouldn't let him help at all. On the third day, both Miranda and Jack had to leave for an emergency at the office and left Harry and Hermione on their own at home. Harry had opted to finish up his essay for Moody on the combat stances for duels, that had ironically saved his ass when Ron had attacked them, while Hermione was digging through the laundry. She was hunting for a pair of sweat pants and caught the sight of something scarlet in her basket. Pulling it out, she giggled as she realized it was Harry's Quidditch shirt. She grinned mischievously as an idea hit her. Pulling the shirt on over her white tee and grey sweat pants, she looked at her self in the mirror and giggled again. The shirt went down to her mid thigh. The girl pulled her hair back into a simple ponytail and walked up to Harry's room and saw him sitting at the desk, book open and staring out the window.

"Harry?" She called.

He looked back and felt his eyes widen slightly at what he saw.

"Mind if I barrow this for awhile?" She asked.

"Mione. I don't mind if you keep it. Looks loads better on you." He said with a grin.

She blushed and smiled at him.

"Thanks. But I think you should get back to work."

He grinned.

"Sorry. I had a rather beautiful distraction."

Hermione laughed and left the room as Harry grinned from ear to ear. Not a bad break.

-X-X-X-X-X-

The return to school was rather...interesting. Not even a week back and Harry and Hermione already saw another article from Rita Skeeter about them.

Harry Potter's Easter Get Away

Sources have confirmed to this reported that Harry Potter slipped away this past Easter Holiday with one Hermione Granger. No one knew precisely where they headed off to for the week long break from classes though this reporter is willing to bet that it was a steamy getaway for our love struck hero and his girl. This reporter promises to find out just where this romantic little getaway was held and just how far they went.

Harry didn't know what to think when he saw this. And he had very little time to contemplate the rest of the article that went into his and Hermione's supposed sex lives as Professor McGonagall was baring down on him with a grim expression.

"Professor, I swear what she wrote was rubbish!" He said defensively.

"Mister Potter, I know you two haven't done half of what she's written about you but it is a moot point. I am here to inform you that you are to meet Mister Bagman out at the Quidditch Pitch this evening at nine o'clock."

Harry thanked her and turned his attention back to Hermione who seemed to have quite a few letters. But none of them pleasant. And unfortunate one she opened had been full of undiluted bubotuber pus. He took her straight to the hospital wing after he set the mail on fire, letting someone else put it out. It would take awhile to clear up, but Madam Pomfrey managed to stave off the worst of it. That managed to make it back just in time to catch the end of the lesson on niffers, though Harry really couldn't have cared less about the little critters. Hermione was first and foremost on his mind. As is, it was with some reluctance that he left the common room to meet up with the other three champions at the Quidditch Pitch. Harry was happy to see that he was not the first one there. He gave Cedric a brief nod that the other boy returned before a happy Bagman came bouncing over to them as Harry looked at the field in disgust.

"Well, what d'you think?" said Bagman happily he climbed over the last hedge.

"Growing nicely, aren't they? Give them a month and Hagrid'll have them twenty feet high. Don't worry," he added, grinning, spotting the less than- happy expressions on Harry's and Cedric's faces, "you'll have your Quidditch field back to normal once the task is over! Now, I imagine you can guess what we're making here?"

Harry looked around and Krum managed to answer before him.

"Maze." He grunted.

Harry sighed.

"Just great."

-x-x-x-x-x-

Harry was on his way back before he felt a hand on his shoulder. He looked over to see Krum giving him a hard look.

"Can I haff a vord vith you?"

Harry nodded and changed direction toward Hagrid's. If Krum wanted to start something, Hagrid would be able to back him up. Or kill Krum. Possible. Once they reached the edge of the forest, he turned to Krum who gave him a slightly apologetic look.

"I vant to apologize for my blunt request in front of Mister Bagman, but I haff very important news for you. The red head boy. Veasley I think, has been acting strange, muttering about killing you. I wanted to tell you that."

Harry blinked in confusion before giving Krum a smile.

"Thank you for the heads up. But we found out before Easter that he was being controlled. We still-" Harry stopped and pulle dout his wand as quickly as Krum did and spun to face the forest.

"Mr. Crouch?"

-x-x-x-x-x-

Tonight was just getting weirder. First Crouch stumbled out of the woods, babbling insanity, then, he ups and disappears. Harry had no idea just what kind a twisted reality this was, but it was giving him a head ache trying to figure it out. He was sitting in the common room, looking into the fire when he heard a soft voice.

"Harry?"

He turned and saw Hermione walking towards him, her sweats and his Quidditch shirt on. He glanced over and saw the jaws drop from the guys and smirked inwardly. He scooted over to give her room, but hadn't counted on her lying on the couch, using his lap as a pillow.

"What's wrong?" She asked.

Harry stroked her hair and simply tried to decided to how tell her.

"I just had a very crazy encounter by Mr. Crouch." And he went on to tell her what had happened. At the end of the tall, she was looking up at him from her resting place and frowned.

"Something is odd, but we just have to let Dumbledore figure it out."

"Trust me, Mione. I don't plan on looking for trouble."

She gave him a small grin.

"No. But trouble comes looking for you."

He returned her smile before he looked up.

"Why did you jump in between me and the killing curse?" She asked suddenly.

Harry paused. Why had he done it? Surely, because he cared about her. He didn't want to lose her. He seemed to ache just being away from her for classes and at night. He just felt empty unless he had her in his arms...it had to be...

He smirked.

"Well, I'll be damned." He mused once he figured it out.

She gave him a curious look.

"What?"

He looked back down at her.

"I think I love you."

Her eyebrows shot high into her hair before they furrowed.

"What do you mean think?" She asked.

"Because I don't know what love feels like."

She sat up and looked him in the eye with a smile.

"Well...as much as I dislike giving you the answers, I think I will this time. First, tell me how you feel when I'm with you and then what you feel like when I'm gone."

And he told her, verbatim what he had just went over in his head. At the end, she just smiled, with misty eyes.

"Yes. Harry Potter, your in love." She told him.

"What about you?"

"Oh no need to worry about me." She responded, leaning in. "I already know I love you." And with that, she closed the final few inches and gave him a rather passionate kiss that he returned eagerly.

But alas, things seem never to go according to plan for Harry.

"Ahem. If you two could stop swapping spit for a moment, I'd like to say something."

They pulled apart and looked toward the fireplace. Harry was glad they were the last ones up as Sirius head was poking out the fire place with a hint of amusement. Harry glared at him.

"What do you want?"

Hermione swatted his arm.

"Harry. Be nice." Harry grumbled his response and they crouched down near the fire.

"So...anything interesting happen recently?" he asked.

Harry shared a look with Hermione before looking back at his Godfather.

"You have no idea how interesting."

Chapter IV

It Followed Me Home

Harry finished his tale to his Godfather who gave him a disappointed look.

"And I thought you were intelligent."

"What does that mean?" Harry asked.

"It was a set up. And a very cleaver one at that."

Hermione was also curious by this.

"What do you mean, Sirius?"

The man paused and looked up at them, deathly serious.

"There is an illusion Charm. A very powerful one that makes one see and live things as if they truly happened. My guess is it that there is also a timed obliviate charm in place to wipe it from you memory tomorrow morning. But for what purpose?"

All three were silent before Sirius spoke up.

"Harry. You said that when you took the curse, which might I doubt was actually used, you said Godric Gryffindor spoke to you, correct?"

Harry nodded.

"Did you see anything...familiar about him? Anything at all, no matter how small."

Harry paused and thought back to it.

"Well, he had a twinkle in his eye that reminded me of Dumbledore. Why do you ask?"

Sirius frowned and looked at them.

"I don't think we can trust Dumbledore fully anymore."

"Why?"

"I believe he set this up, somehow. If I'm right, he used a very complex illusion spell to set this up. I bet if you go to where you had this little duel, the battle damage would be gone."

Harry opened his mouth, but Hermione stopped him.

"Can you explain, please?" She asked.

Sirius nodded.

"I think that he placed you both under an illusion using familiar people in it so you wouldn't suspect it of being so. I believe that you both were in a shared, sleep induced illusion, so as to not arouse suspicion. Once inside, I believe he began looking for something. What did Gryffindor tell you?"

"That I had a bit of Voldemort's soul in me."

Sirius' eyes went wide.

"Horcrux! That was what he was looking for!"

"Sirius, what do you mean?"

"Dumbledore believed that Voldemort had made Horcrux, and that was how he survived. He even brought it before some of us before Voldemort fell. None of us wanted to believe it, yet it seems he was correct. And since you were not 'killed' by Ron, that piece that you saw is still in side you."

Harry fell backwards, his back hitting the couch, fear on his face.

"So...I'm..."

Sirius knew where he was going and shook his head.

"No. You only contain a small piece of him, but you are you. But I fear that Dumbledore may be manipulating things in his own favor. And I don't like it."

"But what do we do if we won't remember it?" He asked.

Now he knew why Dumbledore told him not to worry about it.

"Write it down before you go to bed. I'm sure that there is another memory there that will show that you were sick or something like that."

Hermione cocked her head to the side.

"But why erase it now? Why not the night after it happened?"

"He asked you not to worry about it, correct?"

They nodded.

"And he told you he swore the student body to secrecy, correct?"

Again, they nodded.

"And there is the problem. Skeeter would have blasted this across the front page that you survived a second killing curse."

Hermione's eyes widened as she turned to Harry.

"He's right! Someone would have said something!"

Harry's face darkened.

"Damn it. I can't believe this. And we were falling right into his little plan." He seethed.

"Well...we'll just have to play his game and see what he plans on doing. I don't think he'll sacrifice you...at least not yet. He still does things for the greater good."

Harry however, wasn't paying attention as something struck him.

"Sirius. The Third task. What if whoever put me in the Goblet strikes then?" He asked.

Hermione looked to the older man who frowned.

"Then you have to be prepared for that possibility. Dark things indeed are coming to a head and I believe that the Third Task is the crux in the plan."

Harry looked back to Sirius, but his face was full of determination.

"We'll just have to show them that you don't mess with us."

-X-X-X-X-X-

Albus sat at his desk, a piece of parchment layed flat in front of him. He was trying to figure out just how many Horcrux Riddle had. But he knew of at least two.

"The Diary is destroyed, so that removes that one. However, Harry is another one, though I believe he is an unintentional one. Then the one in Albania. That so far makes three. But how many more?" He wondered.

He leaned back in his chair and looked at his cloak, but a number seemed to almost jump out at him. He looked back at the parchment and his eyes widened.

"Seven. He has seven! Harry, The Diary, the one in Albania...but what are the other four? The mind link helped me to prove that Harry was one, much to my own suspicions. But what of the others? They would have to have some sort of pull toward him, but what?"

Dumbledore contemplated this in silence. He did not like what he did to Harry and Hermione, but it needed to be done, otherwise, it could hurt his plans latter on down the line. But, alas, the needs of the many out weigh the needs of the few. He looked back over the parchment as he searched his memory and realized that Tom had a fondness for the Founders of Hogwarts. And it wouldn't be a stretch to think that he'd have used something of theirs, no matter how trivial. But he had the last known artifact of Gryffindor sitting behind him. So that left Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and Slythrein. He looked at his list and saw that he was still one short. He had no idea what was left. But a sudden thought struck him. What if Riddle was one Horcrux short of seven before he went to kill Harry? It made sense, since he probably would have reserved significant deaths for the Horcrux process. So he would have used Harry's death to create his

seventh and final one that night. Now, he just had to locate where young Mister Riddle hid his remaining Horcrux.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry woke the next morning with a stretch and looked around his room. It was quiet. He had agreed last night to meet Hermione in the common room to discuss the third task and what he could do to survive it. It was going to be a hell of a bit of training he mused as he came down the steps, only to see a confused Hermione holding to sheets of parchment. She saw him and beckoned him over to her.

"Harry. I think we have a problem." She said as she handed him the papers.

Harry took them and looked over it and read his own untidy scrawl and Hermione's nice tidy writing. His brow furrowed as he handed her back the papers.

"We're being manipulated by the Headmaster? Great." He muttered.

Hermione stuffed the papers in her bag.

"Never mind that. We have to get you ready for the next task."

"To the Library!" He joked as she gave him an amused smile.

"Ass." She said as she walked past him.

Harry blinked in confusion before grinning and following her out the portrait hole and down to the Library.

-X-X-X-X-X-

It was coming down to the wire now. Harry could almost feel the Third Task approach as if it were some demented predator stalking him. It also didn't help that people in the corridors were going back to the way they did before the first task. But Harry felt that for once, he was going in fully prepared. Granted, he didn't know what else would be in the maze, but Hermione had looked up every spell that she felt could help him. The only other thing he had to worry about now was Dumbledore. If he was being manipulated like he thought he was, then things could turn fairly nasty rather quickly if he wasn't

careful. So he decided to worry about him later. The morning of the third Task found Harry and Hermione sitting side by side during breakfast when Professor McGonagall told him that the Champions were meeting in the side chamber, and some fear that he had forgotten the time for the task, Harry left the table and entered the side Chamber. What he saw was not what he expected. Standing by the fire, grins on their faces was Remus. Harry cocked his head to the side as he approached the man. Lupin, seeing his confusion chuckled.

"Your dad was one of my best mates. I'd have been an unofficial Uncle for you had they lived. So...I hear from Padfoot that you and Miss Granger have become an item?" He asked pleasantly.

Harry grinned and blushed at the statement and simply nodded his head. Lupin chuckled and leaned close to Harry.

"I heard about what happened from Padfoot. We'll discuss it later." He stood straight and clapped him on the shoulder. "So. Third Task, eh?"

Harry nodded.

"Yeah. It's a maze so Hermione and me guessed that the trophy will be at the center of the maze. She's been running me through the ringer, almost beating spells into my head that she's sure will help."

Lupin smirked.

"That's what you get for dating the brightest witch of your generation, Harry. Now, let's go take a walk shall we?"

Ten minutes later, Harry and Lupin ended up near the same tree that Harry had asked Hermione out with a thoughtful look on his face.

"Yes. Sirius told me what he had heard from you. And it does trouble me that Dumbledore would do such a thing. This is...troubling Harry. As is, you must be careful during the task. It would be the perfect time for something to happen."

Harry nodded. They had already went over that.

"But what about Voldemort?"

"If he is indeed getting stronger, our first priority is your safety. He cannot hope to lay a hand on you while you're here at the school."

"If that is the case, then why strike at the third task? More than likely, with so many present, he couldn't act."

Lupin looked at him gravely.

"Let us hope that is the case. We still don't know the full extent of his abilities as of yet, so keep on your guard."

Harry gave him a grin.

"You know me Remus."

Lupin smirked.

"Yes. I do. So much like your father."

Harry chuckled.

"I'll take that as a compliment." He stated.

Lupin laughed and Harry soon joined him.

"Harry? Professor Lupin?"

The two of them looked over to see Hermione walking over toward them

"Ah. Hermione. Wonderful to see you again, though you don't have to call me Professor."

She returned his smile and looked pointedly at Harry.

"Forget to tell me where you went?" She asked.

Harry went wide eyed before he pointed at Lupin.

"Don't get mad at me. He wanted to talk."

"Now, Harry. Don't put your own mistake on me. I'd have gladly waited for you to tell her where you were." He said with some amusement.

Harry glared at him.

"Traitor." He hissed.

Lupin chuckled and glanced at his watch.

"I'm sorry to cut this short, but I have a certain dog that I need to speak with. Best of luck tonight Harry. I'll try to make it to see the event."

Harry and Hermione bide him farewell as he headed back to the Castle. Hermione looked at Harry and smirked.

"So. I believe I should punish you. You left the Great Hall with out telling me, leaving me to sit and worry you were in trouble, and only to find out you left by asking Professor McGonagall."

Harry looked at her nervously as she crossed her arms over her chest and gave him a mischievous smile.

"Um...does I'm sorry work?" he asked.

"No. Not the least. I haven't come up with a good one yet, but rest assured, it will be coming. Now, lets go get some more practice in while we can."

She held out her hand that he gladly took in his, enjoying how soft her hand felt in his.

Together, the love struck teens made their way back to the Castle for some last minute practice.

-X-X-X-X-X-

"Ladies and gentlemen, in five minutes' time, I will be asking you to make your way down to the Quidditch field for the third and final task of the Triwizard Tournament. Will the champions please follow Mr. Bagman down to the stadium now."

Harry rose from the dinner table and gave Hermione a quick kiss, and grinned as he heard the wolf whistles and cheers, leaving a thoroughly reddened Hermione ducking her head with a smile. Harry tried his hardest to ignore the calls, but it was hard to ignore Fred and George both calling him and Hermione Mr. and Mrs. Potter, even though he liked the sound of it and he was sure Hermione did as well. He had to shake off Bagman who seemed to want to help him out even now. It confused him, but he simply ignored it and made his way out to the stadium field, to the sound of thunderous applause. Harry looked up at the stands and couldn't help but grin as he saw Hermione wearing jeans and his Quidditch shirt. Harry turned and faced Bagman as he explained the rules and what not that he needed to know. Harry barely paid any attention to who would be going in first as he saw his Godfather in dog form up in the stands beside Remus. He couldn't have felt safer than what he did at that moment. Boy, would that bite him in the ass later.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry struggled to stand on his leg as he and Cedric stared numbly over at the dead body of the huge spider. Harry didn't know whether he wanted to punch Hagrid or turn his beard pink. He decided on the pink beard. Yep. Defiantly a pink beard.

"Harry!" he heard Cedric shouting. "You all right? Did it fall on you?"

"No," Harry called back, panting.

He looked down at his leg. It was bleeding freely. He leaned against the hedge, gasping for breath, and looked around. Cedric was standing feet from the Triwizard Cup, which was gleaming behind him.

"Take it, then," Harry panted to Cedric. "Go on, take it. You're there."

Cedric shook his head.

"You helped me with the dragon and you saved my ass from Krum. You deserve it."

"Don't be thick. I had help with the dragons myself. Besides...I really don't want it that bad. Besides, you're already there and it's a Hogwarts victory no matter what." Harry stated, using one of the

healing charms Hermione had made a point of him to learn to stem the blood from the cut and make it to where he didn't wince every time he took step.

Cedric looked at the cup before looking back at him, grinning.

"Well, if it doesn't matter to you, how about we both take it?"

Harry saw no reason to object and limped over to Cedric, not feeling too much pain in his leg. He looked to the older boy and nodded.

"On three then."

"One. Two...three!" Both of them grabbed the cup and Harry felt himself yanked up by and noticed that his hand seemed to be glued to the trophy.

After what felt like an eternity, Harry felt his feet hit solid ground and his legs gave out. Cedric seemed unaffected by the landing and simply stared at the Trophy.

"Portkey? But why on Earth...?" He let his voice trail off as he saw Harry clutching his forehead. "Harry? What-"

"Cedric! Get to the Portkey! Now!" He hissed through clenched teeth.

Cedric looked at him like he was crazy. Harry didn't have time to explain.

"GRAB THE DAMN PORTKEY!" He bellowed.

Cedric hurried over to the key and grabbed, vanishing in a flash of light. Harry slowly rose to his feet as the being shuffled into view. Harry felt his scar explode but refused to let it affect him. But that was besides the point as he felt himself slammed against a headstone, his wand falling from his hand. Harry glanced at the name on the headstone and swore when he saw the surname. Riddle.

"Damn it!" He cursed as he lashed out a foot that caught the short man in the head causing his hood to fall and showing Wormtail's face.

The man stumbled back, holding the side of his face, glaring at Harry.

"COME BACK OVER HERE SO I CAN KICK YOU AGAIN, YOU BASTARD!" Harry screamed.

Wormtail ignored him and continued on his task. A cauldron in front of him began to bubble as the fire burst into existence. He dropped the bundle into the cauldron and turned back to Harry and raised his wand.

"Bone of the father, unknowingly given. You will revive your son."

The bone dropped in and hissed, and turned poisonous shade of blue. Next, Harry watched in morbid fascination as Wormtail cut his own hand off, letting it drop into the potion. Next, he approached Harry with a knife and cut into his forearm and drop it into the potion. After several silent moments, Harry watched as a skeletal man rise out of the cauldron.

"Robe me." He ordered.

Harry paid little attention to Voldemort and Wormtail play master and servant for several minutes. He also watched as he summoned his Death Eaters, only to taunt Harry and make threats to his followers. Harry watched as he turned to face him, sneer on his face as he looked into Harry's eyes.

"I can touch you know, Harry." He said as he placed his finger on Harry's forehead.

Harry winced as pain shot through his head, but remained silent. Voldemort pulled his hand away and quickly stepped away, excitement on his face. With a wave of his wand, Harry dropped to the ground. Harry scrambled to his feet and looked at Voldemort defiantly as he gripped his retrieved wand tightly. Voldemort smirked.

"I take it you know how to duel, Harry?"

The boy nodded and Voldemort smile grew wider.

"Splendid. Now, we must first bow."

Harry didn't want to, but decided to go along with what he had planned. Maybe he'd get lucky and kill the bastard here and now. Harry gave him a rather exaggerated bow.

"It is an honor to face you, Lord Voldemort." He mocked.

The man's smirk faltered but it stayed in place.

"Ah...but the honor is mine, Harry Potter. Now, we shall begin, but first, any last words for your mud blood whore? I'll be sure I tell her as I torture her myself."

Harry felt his anger spike at this point, pushing the pain out of his head as he and Voldemort both raised their wands.

"Crucio!"

"Defodio!"

Harry managed to dodge Voldemort's curse, if barely. The Dark Lord however, completely negated Harry's spell. Harry rose back up and glared at him. Voldemort smirked.

"Please Harry. If this is the best you have, I suppose I should end this. Goodbye, Harry."

Harry saw him raise his wand and knew it was over. He had nothing he could do. He began to think about his friends and everyone at the school. And suddenly, the smiling face of Hermione popped into his head. He felt his heart swell at the thought of her and gripped his wand tightly. No way would he die here! If he died and Voldemort got his hands on her...hot rage flared up inside him as he raised his wand quickly. Voldemort was already screaming his spell.

"Avada Kedavra!"

"Expelliarmus!"

The two spells impacted into each other. Harry watched as the wands seemed to connect with the connecting pointseeming to move back and forth. Harry didn't know why, but he didn't want that point to reach his wand. Concentrating all his might into his wand, he watched as it slowly made it's way toward Voldemort's. He

almost smiled when he saw the look of fear across his face. With a last surge of power into his spell, it jumped the last two inches and impacted into Voldemort's wand. He watched as several ghost-like beings appeared from his wand and was surprised to see his parents. His mother gave him a smile as his father placed a hand on his shoulder. Outside the golden cage, the Death Eaters weren't to happy.

"Harry. You've been very brave. And you have made us very proud."

"Son. When we tell you too, break the connection and make your way toward where the Portkey was." His father told him.

"And just what good where that do with where it was?" He asked through gritted teeth.

James gave him a stern look.

"Just trust us."

Harry decided not to object. What other choice did he have? Argue with his dead parents?

"Harry. I just want to say that you have done remarkable. Also, take good care of Hermione. She is such a sweet girl and cares deeply for you. I know the two of you will be happy for a very long time." His mother told him, smiling.

James glanced back at Voldemort before looking back at his son, giving him a familiar grin.

"Old pad foot is right by the way. You seem to have more luck with the ladies than I did."

Harry gave a pained grin.

"Alright Harry. Get ready. You'll have only moments until we vanish, so run quickly."

Harry nodded and waited until his father gave him the signal. Harry yanked his wand up and heard a loud scream as the ghostly beings rushed Voldemort. Harry didn't wait to see what happened and ran

as fast as he could toward the point he was told to. He arrived just in time to see a familiar scarlet and gold bird appear.

"Fawkes!" He breath.

The Phoenix landed on his shoulder and the next thing Harry knew, he was falling to the ground in front of Dumbledore. The old man kneeled next to him, worry on his face. Harry looked at him with a serious expression.

"He's back."

Dumbledore gave a grave nod.

"I know. Come. We must get up to the medical wing. Young Cedric arrived and informed me it was a Portkey. Once he told me that, I sent Fawkes to get you."

Harry nodded and rose to his feet.

"I am afraid that I will be unable to walk you down to the medical wing as I must meet with the minister. However, I believe I have found a decent replacement for your trip." He said with a smile.

Harry was puzzled as he heard the door open.

"Harry!"

He smiled and faced the bushy haired blur that impacted into him.

"Hermione." He said softly as he stroked her hair.

She pulled away and gave him a stern look.

"Harry James Potter. If you ever pull another stunt like that, I'll...I'll..."

Harry chuckled and pulled her into another hug. A short cough caused him to look back at a smiling Dumbledore.

"While I am what they call a hopeless romantic, I must insist that Harry is taken to the medical wing. Directly to the medical wing." He

emphasized the last part making Hermione blush as she dragged Harry out of the Headmaster's office.

Once they were gone, Dumbledore frowned.

"This will not do. He is becoming too powerful too quickly. He must stay under my control."

-X-X-X-X-X-

The final days of the school year passed quickly for Harry and Hermione. It was with a bit of sadness that he noted Ron never seemed to talk to them, but Harry figured that since he didn't, he wasn't worth being a friend. The end of the year feast didn't seem as grand or as impressive, at least not after the Yule Ball. They listened to Dumbledore's speech about Voldemort, but he doubted it would make a difference since the Minister had flat out refused to believe what Harry and Dumbledore told him. But Harry could care less he and Hermione sat on the Hogwarts express, and Harry didn't like knowing that he only had a few hours left with her before they were separated for the summer holidays. Harry sat leaning against the window with Hermione laying with her head on his lap. Harry was absentmindedly stroking her hair.

"Harry? What's wrong?" She asked.

He glanced down at her.

"I'm just not looking forward to this summer."

She gave him a confused look.

"Why?"

"The Dursleys."

Hermione looked confused for a moment before looking sheepish.

"I guess I forgot to tell you the good news."

He looked down at her in confusion.

"What good news?"

She smiled at him.

"Mum and Dad invited you to spend the summer with us."

Harry looked at her with his jaw agape before he grinned.

"That is good news. I guess we'll have to tell my Aunt and Uncle then, huh?"

Hermione smiled and pulled him down into a kiss that he returned. The ride back was very pleasant for the pair as Hermione locked the door and drew the blinds. No one bothered to enter their compartment.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry and the Grangers made their way over to the Dursleys who were rather surprised. Vernon Dursley raised an eyebrow at Hermione's father.

"Doctor Granger? What are you-" His voice died out when he saw Harry next to them with Hermione and his eyes narrowed. "Oh. So...your daughter is one of them."

Jack did not like the way his face looked as he said it.

"We've come to inform you that Harry will be staying with us this summer. Do you have any problem with that?"

Vernon snorted.

"No. No problem at all. Would have been nice to know so I didn't waste the time to drive up here."

Jack narrowed his eyes and bade them farewell. Harry fell in step behind Hermione's father with her hand in his and a curious expression on his face that Jack noticed.

"I've done a few exams for your Uncle over the years, Harry. It is a pity to say I know them. Now, let's get home. Miranda is looking forward to seeing you again."

The ride was comfortable for Harry and he had to admit that this summer didn't look like it would be a bad one. This was reaffirmed when Mrs. Granger pulled him into a hug.

"It's wonderful to see you again, Harry."

Harry was let go and smiled at her.

"Thanks, Mrs. Granger. It's a pleasure to see you again as well."

She smiled at him and pulled him inside. Harry followed her inside and sat down at the table at her request. A moment later, Jack walked in, both trunks held in his hands, a grin on his face.

"I guess all the working out I've been doing has made me very strong."

Hermione appeared beside him, bemused.

"Also helps that Harry and I bewitched our trunks to be light as a feather."

Miranda laughed as Jack pouted at his daughter while Harry tried not to laugh.

"Gee. Some daughter you are."

This time, Harry was unable to contain his laughter.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Night found Harry sitting on the Grangers back porch, enjoying the peace and quiet of the evening. A sound of a shutting door made him glance over and he saw Hermione walking outside. She smiled and sat down beside him, resting her head on his shoulder and sighed happily.

"I could really get used to this." She stated, closed her eyes.

"So could I."

She smiled even wider as she nuzzled his neck.

"Penny for your thoughts?" She asked.

"Mmm...just thinking about the future."

"Specifically?" She asked.

"Us. Thinking about the possibilities."

She pulled back and cocked her head to the side.

"Like what?"

He smiled as he stroked her cheek.

"Something my mother told me in the graveyard."

She had her eyes closed as she simply enjoyed the feeling of his touch.

"And what was that?"

"That I should take good care of you and that we'll be happy for a very long time."

Hermione put on a mocked expression of shock.

"Harry Potter. Are you saying that you want me and only me?"

Harry grinned widely.

"Why yes, Miss Granger. I am."

"Then I accept. But you do realize that you pretty much proposed, right?" She asked him.

"Well, I know we're still young, but when we're of age, and if your still willing, then I do plan on asking you."

Hermione blushed and hugged him tightly.

"I can't wait for that day."

Harry smiled and hugged her just as tightly.

"Niether can I. Niether can I."

-X-X-X-X-X-

Dumbledore sat in silence as he stared at the papers in front of him. They were reports of Harry's growth since he had first arrived to the end of this past year. Also included were eye witness reports of his duel with Voldemort, despite how brief it was, and his recent development of his relationship with Miss Granger. What really surprised him was when he saw the name appear next to Harry's with the words engaged next to it. This was not what he had planned.

"I suppose I must get Miss Weasley to take on more...aggressive approach to this matter. Harry must remain under control."

For Harry was far more powerful than he had anticipated. And if his growth continued, the he would indeed lose control of him. And if his plans for the Wizarding World were fulfill themselves, then he need Harry to be weak willed. Otherwise, Dumbledore would never gain control. And that would not do. No. Not one bit.

And that concludes book Four. I know last chapter was a bit confusing, but I forgot to add the conversation with Sirius in so it would make sense. Oh well. Too late now. I can only hope you will forgive me for my mistake. It will not happen again. I promise.

Chapter V

Imaginary Grace

Alastor Moody was not one for cloak and dagger tricks. He was the person who would meet his opponent head on, rather than striking from the shadows. But this new game of Albus' worried him. He was playing with fire and the old fool would probably get them all burned. He sat across from the Headmaster and frowned, but knew it would be hard to tell. He seemed to have his face frozen in a frown. But Albus knew him well.

"Something on your mind, Alastor?"

Moody sighed and nodded.

"This plan of your's. It's too risky. You putting a lot of faith into it with plenty of opportunities for it to blow up in our faces!"

Albus cocked his head to the side.

"To what do you refer, old friend?"

Moody sighed and spoke to him much calmer.

"Albus," He began, "Your trying to run this plan without any back ups. What if the boy is killed before school by his relations? Or one of a million other things could go wrong. And the girl, this Weasley girl. Are you sure that she is the best option for Harry? Far as I can tell, Granger has a much more level head and has Potter wrapped around her little finger."

Albus smiled at him.

"Alastor. This plan had been in place for thirteen years now and every possible contingency is in place for Harry to fulfill his destiny."

"You means your's?" Moody muttered.

Albus sighed.

"Our destinies are intertwined. 'Both Warriors of the light Shall rise to vanquish the Dark Lord. They wield a power he knows not. The two

will stand side by side against the darkness, or should they stand alone, fall to eternal Darkness. One cannot survive without the other.' That Alastor, is part of the true prophecy. Harry has been close to death several times and has been saved by my timely arrival. Hence, I am a 'warrior of the light' and Harry is another."

"You put too much into that old codswallop. A destiny isn't written in stone.."

Albus sighed and nodded, agreeing with him.

"True. And to answer your prior question, yes. Miss Weasley is the best choice. She will give him something to fight for and a reason to live. Miss Granger would be better off as a close friend, for if she dies, Harry may fall into the path of darkness."

Moody snorted.

"You're an old fool. She is safer with Potter than the Weasley girl is. Because she sticks with him through out his adventures, I'd say her life expectancy to be higher than the Weasley girl."

Albus shook his head.

"No. Harry must fall for Ginny Weasley. I am sorry that you feel how you do, but the Greater good must come before the simple preference of a teenaged boy. Was there anything else, Alastor?"

Moody frowned again at his friend and nodded.

"Crouch received another letter with instructions on it. Wondering what I should tell him."

Albus sighed.

"Ah, yes. Mr. Crouch. A man in a frustratingly difficult position. How are his mental shields?"

"Dark Lord hasn't even begun to suspect that Crouch has them. Crouch Sr. he knew had them, being a ministry official."

Dumbledore nodded.

"Too true. A shame Mr. Crouch was forced to take the life of his own father."

"When someone's mind is that far destroyed, there isn't much you can do. Besides, Crouch's cover as a death eater would be blown if his father popped into St. Mungo's in that state."

"True. How is he holding up?"

"He's in a right foul state, Albus. Boy lost his father and was the one who had to kill him. If you'll excuse me, I must make sure he hasn't poison himself with fire whisky yet."

With that, Alastor Moody rose from his chair and headed for the door, but stopped with his hand on the knob. He looked back at Dumbledore.

"Albus. Your putting us all in danger by playing these games with him. But be warned. If I even so much as think your crossing the line between light and dark, I'll deal with you myself. And your coming dangerously close to it as is, old friend."

With that, Moody left, leaving a tired Dumbledore. He just hoped that when the time came, Moody would see things his way. After all, it was for the Greater Good. But Dumbledore forgot one little detail. There was one other person always with Harry when he was near Death. Some one who has always been loyal. Too bad he forgot that little bit.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry growled in frustration at the parchment in front of him. Of the eighteen inches that Professor Binns asked for, Harry still had six inches left and had no idea what else to put. Hermione looked at him in amusement as he grabbed his hair, looking like he was going to rip it out.

"Harry. Come now. We're almost done. This is the last one we have left."

Harry glared at her.

"We've been at this a week Hermione. Besides, what reward is there for doing all this?" He asked, gesturing to the scrolls across the table.

Hermione smirked.

"I didn't know this was reward based. If so, I must get a big prize for all this." She said, pointing at her neat stack almost twice the size as Harry's. His glare remained.

"That was cold. But I still don't see what I'm supposed to get out of all this."

Hermione paused and furrowed her brow, clearly thinking before she smiled.

"How many do you have done?" She asked.

He paused and looked over his homework.

"I've got...Potions, Charms, Transfiguration, Divination, Care of Magical Creatures, Defense Against the Dark Arts, Astronomy done and I have History of Magic in my hands now. Why?"

"Well, for every essay you have done, you get a kiss."

He raised an eyebrow.

"I don't think a kiss per balances out how much it sucked writing all of this."

She gave him another smirk.

"Remember the night before the third task?"

He immediately grinned from ear-to-ear.

"How could I forget. Only time your hand-"

"IF you get all of this done tonight, we'll do that again." She said, cutting him off with a loud if.

She didn't want her parents to know she tried to grope Harry. She could live without seeing their faces if they knew, thank you very

much. Harry, however, was staring intently at his parchment, course book laid wide open and he began to write. He wasn't going to lose that perfect prize! Tonight would be a good night indeed!

-X-X-X-X-X-

Sirius Black sighed as he laid on his bed. In the corner sat Buckbeak, his fellow escapee. True, the Hippogriff tried to kill Draco, but it was because the slimy little git insulted the beastie. Almost as if sensing Sirius' discomfort, Beaky gave a short cry. Sirius frowned and looked over at him.

"No. I can't invite Harry. Dumbledore thinks he's safer where he is."

Another short squawk.

"So? I respect Dumbledore and I know what he is doing."

The Hippogriff gave him a look that clearly showed disbelief. Sirius sighed.

"Fine. Your right. The oldman is up to something, but nobody knows what. But let's not worry about that. It's time for our favorite game. Truth or Dare."

Buck beak let out a squawk.

"Damn. You would choose truth."

-X-X-X-X-X-

Summer was moving quickly, something Harry, for once, didn't like. He was enjoying himself immensely. The Grangers lived out near the mountains, so he was able to fly, albeit, low, but it didn't stop him from practicing his Quidditch. One day, in mid June, Jack had asked him what he was doing. Once Harry told him, the man asked for details. After about an hour of talking to him, including discussing the finer points of it, Harry learned that Jack loved sports with a passion and had told Harry he had a good mark in his book for being an athlete. But tonight, he simply laid out in the back yard, staring up at the stars when he began to feel a chill. Harry was about to push the feeling aside until he realized just how deep the cold went. Bone deep...Harry leapt to his feet, wand gripped tightly as he looked

around for the source. A sudden scream alerted him that the source was at the house. Harry ran as fast as he could and what he saw made him freeze. Standing at the doorway, holding Miranda by the throat, was a Dementor. Harry didn't even think and rushed the thing, slamming into it with his shoulder, throwing it off of Mrs. Granger. The woman lowered to the ground and took up the fetal position. Harry, however, was worse off. He finally was able to see just what he was up against. A pair of dementors. Harry could feel their effect on him already. He pointed his wand and pulled up the memory of him and Hermione earlier, chasing after each other in the field.

"Expecto Patronum!" He cried.

A wall of silver appeared in front of him. He heard the door open and saw Jack holding a rifle, looking for whatever Harry was fighting.

"GET BACK INSIDE!" Harry snapped his head back to the dementors as his silver shield flickered. "Ah shit!"

The Shield shattered and they began to advance in him. Harry couldn't think. He was frozen to the spot until he heard a voice cry out to him.

"HARRY!"

Hermione's voice blasted into his head like a bolt of lightning. Using all his focus, he concentrated on the day he came back with her. That night specifically, and how it felt to kiss her. With a new roar of fire in his chest, he pointed his wand at the dementors.

"EXPECTO PATRONUM!"

Thus time, a silver stag burst from his wand and charged the dementors, chasing them off before the stag faded out of existence. Harry, exhausted, dropped to the ground, breathing hard as Hermione ran out to him. Harry gave her a tired smile before there was a loud popping noise. Harry raised his wand and saw...

"Remus? What are you doing here?"

Lupin paused and raise his wand at Harry, seriousness on his face.

"Remus? What the hell?"

But Lupin stayed where he was.

"What was the creature we studied the Monday after Snape had you write the essay on werewolves?" He asked simply.

Harry looked at him confused.

"What's going on here?"

"Answer the question."

"A hinkypunk. Remus, what's going on?"

"Not yet Harry. Hermione...What did I tell you after the Third Task? In the hospital wing?"

Hermione blushed and glared at him.

"Take care of Harry. Stay with him and raise a litter of little Potters with him."

Lupin sighed and put his wand away before walking over to them.

"Sorry about that. Had to make sure you were really you. I'm here to move you to a safe lo...ca...tion." He paused and smiled at them.

Harry and Hermione pointed their wands at him. Hermione was still red in the face as Harry tried to contain a smirk, as Jack got Miranda into the house, and thankfully didn't hear Hermione.

"What did I hear when we were practicing the Patronus? Specifically, near the end?"

Remus gave him a somber look.

"Your father and your mother just before they were murdered."

Harry nodded and put his wand away, as did Hermione.

"Now, what were you saying about a safe location?" Harry asked.

Remus nodded.

"Voldemort is starting to gather followers again, and at an astounding rate. As is, Dumbledore believes they will take steps to force you to reveal yourself to them."

Harry and Hermione shared a look before turning back to Remus.

"Too late on that. We just had a Dementor attack. Ministry will know where we are."

Remus frowned before he brightened up.

"This could work to our advantage. Dementors are known to pass out this way on patrols on occasion. And there have been quite a few cases of them attacking around here as well. But, we'll leave that to Dumbledore. In the meantime, let's get you two ready to go." He said, ushering them into the house.

Jack was in the sitting room, trying to comfort his wife when Remus walked in.

"Who the bloody hell are you?"

Remus smiled and offered him a polite bow.

"Professor Remus Lupin. I had the pleasure to teach your daughter in her third year."

Jack blinked.

"Er...alright. Can you tell me just what happened out there?"

Remus nodded as Harry and Hermione headed upstairs to pack.

"What you both felt were the effects of Dementors. Apparently, a pair of them on patrol took it upon themselves to attack and Harry was able to repel them."

Jack looked out the window in worry before turning his focus back to Remus.

"What do you mean patrol?"

"They check the mountains for any substantial Giant Colonies among other things. But the gist of it, you happen to be living near a mountain that is often checked."

Jack let out a choice swear word and muttered something about moving when he heard a thudding of trunks. Lupin intervened before the children could be question.

"Professor Dumbledore sent me to take them to a safe location. Just a precaution after the attack."

Jack opened his mouth but closed it. Miranda, feeling better, rose to her feet, shaking off the last bit of the effects of the Dementor. Jack came to his feet and both adults shared a looked before facing Remus.

"Alright. But tell him that if something happens to either of them, he'll have to answer to us."

They both knew that the man wasn't telling them something, but knew that the kids would be safer with their headmaster nearby. Remus nodded and turned to Harry and Hermione.

"Ready?" He asked.

Hermione held up and hand and ran over and hugged both her parents and said her goodbye. Jack himself walked over to Harry and held out his hand. Harry grasped it as Jack looked him square in the eye.

"You take care of my little girl, alright?" He said, trying to keep the emotion out of his voice.

Harry nodded and shook his hand.

"I protect her with my life if need be."

Jack smiled and nodded and Miranda appeared and pulled him into a hug.

"Be careful, both of you. It's been a pleasure having you here, Harry. You have to come by again."

"I will. And thank you for allowing me to stay."

After a few almost tearful goodbyes, Lupin took the two by the hand and Apparated from the house.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry tried his best to not gasp for air after they arrived, but he couldn't help it. He took in his surroundings and saw they were in a dark hall. He looked over to Remus who placed a finger on his lips as he pulled out his wand. With a short flick, lights sprang to life and Harry was able to see around him. But what he saw made him wonder if Lupin planned to come to a house that seemed to belong to a dark family. But he kept his mouth shut as Lupin used a silent levitating charm and beckoned them to follow him. They climbed a few flights of stairs where he pointed to a bedroom on the third landing.

"Here is where you two will stay, for the time being. The Weasleys are expected in a few days, so you'll have some company. Right now, however, someone wants to see you, Harry. If you'd both follow me. And try to keep quiet." He added as an afterthought.

Harry and Hermione followed Lupin down to the kitchen. Harry had to admit that even though the house looked like a dark family lived in it, it at least was well cared for. He could smell the food being cooked as they approached the kitchen. Harry was curious as to who wanted to meet him when Lupin poked his head into the kitchen and grinned.

"He's here."

Harry heard the hurried scrape of a chair and saw a man he hadn't seen in person for a little over a year now. Lupin stepped aside, smiling while Harry grinned.

"Harry Potter."

Harry moved and hugged the man, genuinely happy to see him.

"Sirius."

The broke away while Sirius smiled.

"You look more like James now that you did a year ago." He looked behind Harry and saw Hermione, smiling at the scene.

"Hermione. Good to see you again." He said, pulling her into a hug as well.

After a few minutes and some light conversation in the hall, Sirius lead them into the kitchen and Harry noticed a House elf in the room. While he looked old, he at least seemed to be in a good mood as he looked up at Sirius.

"Is these Master's godson and his friend?" He asked in a croaked voice.

Sirius nodded.

"Kreacher. This is Harry and Hermione."

The elf now known as Kreacher bowed to the pair.

"It is nice to meet those who Master holds in such great esteem. If you'll excuse Kreacher, Kreacher must get back to dinner."

The old elf hobbled away and went back to work preparing the meal. Harry gave Sirius a curious look after Remus excused himself for the night. Sirius saw his expression.

"Kreacher is my elf. He's worked for the Noble and Most Ancient House of Black for years now. Suffered a bit under my mother for what he did. Waited for her back to turn and restored my name on the family tree saying 'once a Black, always a Black.' She didn't like that too much. Wasn't happy to see my smiling face on the wall after she blasted it off."

Harry heard Kreacher snort.

"Making Mistress not happy is like Kreacher kicking a sleeping hippogriff. Kreacher still has the scars."

Harry didn't know weather to laugh or be horrified. He settled on shock as did Hermione. Sirius nodded his head grimly.

"It's true. He did kick Buck Beak, the stupid little git."

Kreacher paused and sent a glare at Sirius.

"If Master housebroke hippogriff, Kreacher wouldn't need to wakey it to change the paper."

"You don't have to kick him, you stupid little prat."

Kreacher stiffened and went back to cooking, ignoring Sirius. After some more light conversation, dinner was served. Harry could honestly say that all things considered, it wasn't that bad of a night. At least until three different letters arrived, one saying he was expelled, the other telling him not to surrender his wand, the other telling him his expulsion was put off until a ministry hearing determined his innocence. It helped that Hermione pointed out that he was well with in the law and that magic was allowed under extreme circumstances. The three stayed up late, Harry and Hermione listening to tales about Sirius, James, and Remus at school. It was an entertaining night.

-X-X-X-X-X-

The arrival of the Weasleys didn't help Harry at all. Ron was still being an ass and Ginny was trying to seduce him, granted they were feeble and weak attempts, but they seemed to piss Hermione off to the point she blew up on the younger girl. Harry had never heard Hermione curse before and thought that if it was a TV show, she'd have been speaking in Morse code from all the expletives sent at Ginny. It was rather funny to watch. It didn't help that Mrs. Weasley kept trying to steer him toward Ginny and steer Hermione toward Ron. Thankfully, Mr. Weasley put stop to it, pointing out that she was creating a tense atmosphere. But Harry had other things to worry about since he had learned from observations and asking questions that the house they were in, was the Headquarters for the Order of The Phoenix. But sadly, he never was able to get into one of the meetings. He had meet quite a few new people. There was Tonks, an Auror who could change her appearance at will, Kingsley Shacklebolt, a very cool and collected man who Harry took an instant liking to, and several others including one man he was not so happy to see. Currently, he was looking at him now.

"Good evening Professor." Harry greeted stiffly.

"Potter. Is there something I can do for you?" He asked in bored tone.

Harry gave an internal sigh and pulled out his parchment.

"Sir. I was doing the assignment you gave but I have a question. In the instructions, it says to add the toad spleen after the unicorn hairs. But I noticed that if the hair is added, and then you add the eel eyes followed by the toad spleen, it doubles the potency of the potion. I just wanted to ask what one could expect with the potion twice as potent."

Harry looked up and saw, wonder in Snape's eyes. He held out his hand for the scroll and looked over it before giving a slight nod and looking back at Harry.

"Perhaps you do have a talent for potions after all Potter. As is such, if you increase the potency of the potion, the effects would be twice as devastating. You would most certainly would bring about the desired results quicker, but the strength potion would last almost three times as long according to these notes." He pause and looked back at Harry with calculating eyes. "Though we are not in school...Ten points to Gryffindor. I take my leave of you Potter."

Harry watched in shock as Snape left. He'd actually given points? And to Harry of all people! The Twins were in shock as well, and it was all they could talk about all summer. But sadly, summer didn't end quickly enough. Right now, he was facing an angry Ron.

"You! What are you doing here Potter?"

Harry blinked and wondered if Draco was inhabiting Ron for a moment before he answered.

"I live here, Ron. My Godfather owns the house, and he told me I can live here if I wanted."

Ron continued to glared.

"All the same, stay out of my way, traitor."

"Traitor? What the hell are you talking about?"

"You left your best mate for a girl! Not just any girl, but Hermione! She's so annoying! Only reasons I put up with her were so you'd still be my friend, and it was always easy to get help with my assignments."

Harry tried his best not to pull out his wand and blast Ron to oblivion.

"Ron. You better get out of my face before I do something stupid to you."

"No! You're the cause of all my problems!" Ron screamed.

"Now what's all this about, boys?" Mr. Weasley asked as he came up the steps.

He was still in his suit and tie from Harry's trial in which the Minister reluctantly agreed to clear him of charges once he disclosed what had happened and Dumbledore and Madam Bones sided with him. He looked tired but still managed a smile. Ron, however, was still in a foul mood and rounded on him.

"Like you care! It's your fault we live like we do! If you didn't love that stupid job of your's, Mum wouldn't have had to sign that marriage agreement!"

Now, Mr. Weasley was not slow, nor stupid. On the list he had just had popping into his head, the more serious matter of the Marriage contract overrode Ron's disrespect. At the moment.

"What contract?" He asked calmly, his eyes narrowed at the youngest Weasley boy.

Ron, still angry, didn't keep his mouth shut.

"The one between Harry and Ginny! Why do you think Mum is trying to break Harry and Hermione up?" He stated furiously.

Harry now felt anger boil up inside of him as Mr. Weasley began to radiate his own rage.

"Ronald Weasley. Go to your room and wait there. I'll be along in a moment." He ordered coolly.

Ron opened his mouth to protest, but Mr. Weasley silenced him.

"NOW. I'll deal with you for your behavior soon enough. Now. Go." He ordered, his hand trembling in anger as he pointed down the steps.

Ron took his leave, grumbling about unfair treatment when Mr. Weasley turned to Harry, sighing as he pinched the bridge of his nose.

"Harry, I'm sorry about all this. I can't undo the damage Ron has caused, but as the Weasley House Patriarch, I can get the contract null and voided." He told him.

Harry felt himself calming down but his curiosity got the better of him.

"How'd Mrs. Weasley get it signed? As far as I know about those, they have to have a representative of both parties sign it."

Mr. Weasley nodded.

"True. However, unlike the Muggle world, in the Wizarding World, the Patriarchs have the final say over the Matriarchs. The Matriarchs have the same powers as the Patriarch in family business, paperwork and such if you will, but the Patriarch has the final say in anything related to the family. That includes Marriage contracts." Mr. Weasley calmly explained.

Harry nodded his understanding at this, but something was still nagging him.

"Who could have signed for me?" He asked.

"Well, technically, Sirius is the only one who can. However, once he went to Azkaban, his position as Magical and Physical Guardian was split between Dumbledore himself and your Aunt and Uncle. All three would have had to agree to sign the paper. Now, if you'll excuse me, Harry. I have a son to punish." He said darkly as he pulled out his wand and headed for Ron's room.

Harry hurried past and went downstairs and pulled Hermione aside and explained everything to her that had been explained to him. She

was, to put it simply, pissed beyond belief. Harry was sure she'd be out for blood if it hadn't been for Mr. Weasley's arrival. And he still didn't look happy as he looked over at Molly.

"Right. Harry and I are off to the Ministry before it closes." He said simply.

Harry nodded and started toward Mr. Weasley.

"Can't it wait until tomorrow, dear? You both have only been home for an hour."

"No Molly. It can't. Also, Ron will not be joining us tonight for dinner."

She looked at him, confused. That boy never missed a meal.

"Why?"

"He's been punished for his behavior toward me in front of Harry and several others. Also, I'll deal with you when we return." He said angrily as he grabbed the pot of Floo powder and took a handful of it.

"What on Earth do you mean?"

He rounded on her, anger on his face. Harry had not seen Mr. Weasley this angry before. Never.

"For setting up a marriage contract with Harry and Ginny! I'm going now to void such agreement."

Mrs. Weasley looked shock before she frowned.

"I only did it because they looked so taken with each other a few years back. I would have voided it if Harry chose another." She said innocently.

Mr. Weasley still looked angry.

"We'll discuss this later." He turned to the fire place and stepped in it, facing outward. "Ministry Atrium!" He called, throwing it at his feet.

He vanished in a flash of emerald green fire. Harry quickly followed his example after he gave Hermione a small kiss. In a flash of emerald fire, he vanished.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry remembered when he had been here earlier this morning. He'd been in front of a whole court ready to prosecute him. Fudge didn't seem to want the truth and wanted to throw Harry in Azkaban as quickly as possible until Harry stood up and said that unless he was allowed to defend himself, he'd clam a mistrial. That shut him up and he was finally able to explain what had happened. Once he had, Fudge had initialed laughed, stating that Dementors would be the perfect defense before Madam Bones spoke up and did state that muggles and witches and wizards are occasionally attacked near Mount Ben Nevis due to the fact of a substantial Giant colony located near the Scottish mountain. And she also did state that the two dementors had indeed been in the area at the time of the attack. Fudge was forced to clear him off all charges due to the exceptional circumstances and dismissed them for the day. Harry had told Mr. Weasley and they had instantly headed back to number 12. Now, he was back and was following the Weasley Patriarch toward an office that had Office of Magical Contracts-Marriage and Betrothal above it. Harry was told to wait outside the office and it was quiet for several minutes before he heard a loud "WHAT?" come from the office. Harry and passerby looked at the door with interest when they heard another scream. "HOW MUCH?" Harry was now thoroughly confused but before he could do anything, Mr. Weasley stepped out of the office and looked back in the door.

"Thank you again, Frank. I'll see to the amount just as long as that contract is voided."

The man named Frank stepped out of the office and Harry almost mistook him for a muggle. The man had short brown hair and wore a pair of glasses.

"Not a problem Arthur. I would ask why you waited for almost thirteen years to void it, but with how shocked you were, I suppose you didn't know."

Mr. Weasley frowned.

"No. I didn't. But thank you again Frank. I owe you."

Frank dismissed it with a wave of his hand.

"Not a problem. It was simple enough to void. If they would have consummated their relationship, we wouldn't have been able to void it."

Mr. Weasley turned a bit red around the ears and nodded.

"Indeed. Well, I must get going. Oh, but before I do, Frank Burns, this is Harry Potter."

Frank looked over at Harry and nodded, holding out his hand and Harry grasped it.

"Nice to meet you Harry. Sorry about all this mess, but we'll get it sorted out. But to put you mind at ease, in our eyes, it is null and void now. Your free from any obligations to the contract."

Harry nodded his head.

"Thank, Mr. Burns. That does help."

The let go and Frank gave a final good bye before Mr. Weasley ushered Harry out of the office and back to the elevator. It was a silent, slow ride so Harry decided to ask what had happened.

"Mr. Weasley, back there I heard you ask how much. How much what?"

The older man looked uncomfortable.

"Well, Harry. Part of the agreement was that 1500 galleons would be moved into the Weasley Vault from the Potter Vault every year the contract was active. On top of that, had you and Ginny married, half of your assets would have transferred ownership to us."

Harry felt his jaw drop before he closed it.

"Don't worry Harry. You'll get the 19,500 galleons back. I promise."

Harry shook his head.

"Don't worry about it. It was hardly a dent in my account. Besides, it's not your fault."

Mr. Weasley sighed and grudgingly agreed to what he said. They traveled back to the house where Mr. Weasley took Mrs. Weasley upstairs. Even down three flights of steps, they could hear the yelling and the argument, but not what it was about. After the two returned downstairs, the atmosphere was tense and it stayed that way until the end of break, which Harry was happy to see for once. Now...if only he could get people to believe he wasn't lying and to not believe the Daily Prophet. That would be a hard task of it's own.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Dumbledore was furious...well...furious for him was irritated for anyone else. He had just learned that Arthur Weasley had voided the contract between Ginny and Harry. Albus sighed and put his emotions in check. The plan was still intact, largely. He just had to hope that even if Miss Granger died, Harry would continue on. He frowned and pulled out the true prophecy, the one made the Sybil after Snape had heard the first part of the fake one. Her voice, ghostly and horse filled his office.

"Darkness approaches, reborn from death...two warriors shall be chosen...one of courage, strength, and passion...the other of knowledge, cunning, and of pure heart...Both Warriors of the light Shall rise to vanquish the Dark Lord...they wield a power he knows not... The two will stand side by side against the darkness, or should they stand alone, fall to eternal Darkness...One cannot survive with out the other."

Dumbledore listened to it again and again, telling himself it was talking about him. But he for some reason...he wasn't so sure. He looked at the clock and saw that it was almost time for the feast. He quickly put the prophecy away and rose from his chair. Harry would be back with in the walls and under his control again. But he wondered just how much control he still had.

If you can't figure out who the prophecy spoke of, then you need to reread the characters. And yes, the Prophecy that is in the ministry is still the 'true one' however, it is incomplete. The whole prophecy in my story goes through Voldemorts downfall and his rebirth. Though

the second half of it tells who can defeat him for good. Just a bit of extra information.

Chapter VI

Mind Your Head

Harry sat comfortably in his compartment, absentmindedly scratching Crookshanks behind his ear, something the animal loved as they waited for Hermione to return to the compartment. She headed off to go see one of the girls from Gryffindor to discuss a few things with them, things she wouldn't tell him, but he had a feeling they were girly in nature. He unconsciously glanced down at the badge on his chest and grinned faintly. He and Hermione had both been selected by Professor McGonagall to become Prefects for their house. Hermione of course had been ecstatic when she found her badge. Harry remembered that day clearly...

(FLASH BACK)

Harry groan as he felt the sunlight creep into the room and strike his face. The young man glared at the partly opened window with pure hatred. But his try at wandless magic was interrupted by a loud boom, followed by an impact of something on his bed.

"Harry! I did it! I did it!"

The boy grabbed his glasses and slipped them on and looked into the smiling face of Hermione.

"Did what 'Mione?" He asked.

She grinned and held out her letter. Harry, being curious, took it and began to read:

Dear Miss Granger,

It gives me great pride to present you your Prefects badge. In the last four years, you have shown yourself to be the best choice out of any of the fifth year girls. On September 1st, you are to attend a mandatory meeting in the Prefects carriage, held by the Head Boy and Head Girl. They will relay your responsibilities and the expectations that you will be held to. Again, congratulations.

Minerva McGonagall

Deputy Headmistress

P.S. I do hope this means you'll be able to keep both Mr. Potter and Mr. Weasley out of trouble, though with who Mr. Potter is related to, I wish you the best of luck.

Harry began to grin as he read that last part. He looked up at her and he grinned even wider.

"So...you have to keep me and Ron out of trouble?"

She smirked.

"I think I'll worry about just keeping you out of trouble. Ron can get expelled for all I care."

Harry opened his mouth to speak when an owl shot down the chimney and dropped a letter on Harry's head before zooming back out the way it came. The boy grabbed the letter and opened it. He failed to notice something small and hard fall out of the envelope as he read the book list, at least, not until he heard Hermione.

"I knew it!" She gasped.

Harry looked over and saw her staring at a badge in her hands.

"Yeah. It's a prefect badge. They tend to wear them."

She sent him a sour look.

"Prat. I meant that this is your badge. It fell out of your letter."

His eyes went wide as he looked back into the envelope and pulled out a second letter and shook it open.

Dear Mr. Potter,

It gives me great pride to present you your Prefects badge. In the last four years, you have shown yourself to be the best choice out of any of the fifth year boys. On September 1st, you are to attend a mandatory meeting in the Prefects carriage, held by the Head Boy and Head Girl. They will relay your responsibilities and the expectations that you will be held to. Again, congratulations.

Minerva McGonagall

Deputy Headmistress

P.S. This means that you now can't go causing all kinds of chaos this year, Mr. Potter. Please try to keep Mr. Weasley from getting himself in trouble. And yes, Miss Granger was also selected.

Harry smirked and handed Hermione his letter for her to read which she did, laughing after she read McGonagall's P.S. at the end. She looked up at Harry with a twinkle in her eyes.

"You realize that this means we have access to a lot more areas of the school, right?"

Harry paused before he smirked.

This was gonna be a good year.

(END FLASHBACK)

Harry had already gone to the meeting with Hermione. It had been a short one, with just being told to uphold the rules, and keep an eye on the other students, and not to cause any trouble themselves. They left the carriage with high spirits, considering that Malfoy was the Slythrean Prefect, and had found a nice empty compartment. Moments later, Hermione had suddenly stated that she needed to go speak with one of the girls and headed out of the compartment, a frown on her face. He had paid it no mind and simply waited for her return, which was about five minutes after the train had departed. She plopped down next to him, worry on her face.

"What's wrong?"

She chewed her bottom lip before answering.

"I think we have to watch ourselves this year, Harry. Ron and Ginny are planning on slipping us love potions."

This put him on alert.

"How do you know? Did you hear them?"

Again, she chewed on her bottom lip.

"Not exactly. Harry, what I'm about to tell you has to stay a secret." She told him, with a pleading look in her eyes.

Harry nodded his understanding and she continued.

"I came across several books while we were at Grimmauld place about mind arts. How to read and how to shield minds. And it had hit me. You were seeing Voldemort's thoughts, and his plans. But it could also be used against us, so I decided to try to master it as much as I could so I could train you in it. That way, you won't have him in your head."

"What's it called?"

"Occlumency. It's a way to shield your mind and to prevent others from reading your's."

Harry was astounded at Hermione and her thinking, but just to be sure...

"If you can read minds, than what am I thinking?" He asked, keeping his face calm.

In his mind, he pulled forth a rather...perverted dream he had the other night about Hermione. He watched her pull out her wand and point it at him.

"Legilimens!"

Harry felt her presence in his mind and he felt warm and comfortable. It was like she was a blanket wrapped around him. But after a moment, it was gone and Harry was looking at the very red face of Hermione.

"I don't think I'm that flexible, Harry." She stated, smiling coyly. "Though I am rather proud you dream about me that way. And how you react to me as well." She said, glancing down at his not-so-baggy robes.

She was teasing him, but he wasn't complaining. He smirked.

"The wand chooses the witch."

Hermione returned his smirk and crossed her arms over her chest.

"Some how, I doubt that is what Mr. Ollivander meant when he said that."

Harry laughed at her statement and she soon joined him. This year would be a good year indeed.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry frowned as the new Professor, Umbridge was her name, sat down before turning to Hermione.

"You figured it out too?" She asked him.

He nodded.

"Seems Fudge wants me and the rest of us under his little thumb. Probably thinks that Dumbledore would raise an army against him."

Hermione frowned and nodded as they listened to the rest of the speech. She figured that Fudge had Moody pulled back to active duty and that, of course, left a hole for him to stick in one of his own. Harry didn't like it. But there was nothing to do about it. The feast started just after Dumbledore gave his few words, allowing discussion to run rampant through the great hall.

"So...we've got a manipulative headmaster working toward an unknown goal, a spy for the ministry, and also a pair of Weasleys who want us under their control. This year is going to be a tough one." Harry stated.

Hermione nodded.

"Yes. But I have neutralizer potion I bough in Diagon Alley a few years ago. Remember when Mrs. Weasley was telling Ginny and I about brewing them in third year?"

Harry nodded.

"I decided to act then and bought some. This should keep us safe from them."

Harry smiled warmly at her.

"What did I ever do to deserve you?" He asked lovingly.

Hermione smiled and kissed him before they settled back down for their meal. Other than glares from Ron and a lust filled look from Ginny, the feast passed smoothly. At the end of it, Harry and Hermione lead the first years to the common room the same way Percy Weasley had done in their first year. After making sure everyone had settled in, Harry and Hermione parted ways at the steps with a kiss before heading up for bed. The first thing Harry noticed was that Ron was now on the other side of the room and Neville was now next to his bed. He also noted the dirty and angry looks Ron was sending his way. Harry decided to ignore him and changed and climbed into bed, letting sleep take him.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Next morning found Harry walking to DADA in a foul mood. He and Hermione had talked over breakfast and had come to the conclusion that she was probably going to try to sabotage him somehow. He just didn't know how to avoid blowing up at her if she had the same attitude she had at his hearing. Just before they entered the room, Hermione pulled him aside.

"Harry. Don't do anything to upset her. Concentrate on something else if she starts to make you mad, something to look forward to."

Harry frowned.

"And just what am I supposed to look forward too? Only thing is Quidditch and Christmas break, and those two things combined probably won't be enough."

Hermione thought for a moment before she nibbled her lower lip, almost as if she was afraid he'd refuse whatever she had thought of.

"Harry. Tell you what. If you can make it to Christmas break without rising to her retorts or whatever else she does to get a rise out of

you, I'll give you a reward. A very big reward. One that you will remember for years to come."

Harry cocked his head to the side.

"I have to wait till Christmas to get the reward?"

She sighed in relief before smiling.

"That isn't just it. You get a fifteen minute session at the end of each week you manage to avoid trouble with her."

"Alright." He said, disgruntled. "But that reward at Christmas had better bloody well be worth it."

Hermione watched him enter the room and smiled to herself.

"It'll be worth it Harry. For both of us." She thought as she followed him into the room.

Almost immediately Hermione disliked the woman. All she talked about was theory and other nonsense. She had to glance at Harry when she started in that Voldemort hadn't returned. She could see Harry's clenched jaw and his narrowed eyes as she finished talking before he looked at the book, almost shaking in anger and rage. After the class ended, Hermione pulled Harry aside and gave him a kiss to calm him and a hug to make him relax. They didn't know that it would be very hard to not rise to Umbridge's goading, but they would certainly try.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Dumbledore frowned as he looked at his notes. He'd decided to distance himself from Harry, incase young Mr. Riddle decided to try to use the connection the two had against his plans. It was risky, that was for sure, but something that couldn't be helped. The boy must be molded into the perfect weapon, otherwise, he would fall to the dark. That was something he could not allow. But right now, his immediate concerns were keeping Molly silent. The woman went into a rage about how unfair it was that Ron had not been made a prefect and that Dumbledore still owed them for the lose of gold they would no longer receive from the betrothal. That it was Dumbledore's fault for allowing a simple muggleborn preventing her

little Princess from becoming Harry's wife. He really did not like the woman, but the Weasleys, well, excluding Bill, Arthur, Charlie, and the twins, were the only ones who he could control as well. He had to think of something to tide them over. Maybe he'd make a quiet transfer of funds into their family vault until Harry either left Miss Granger, something he foresaw as a possibility because he honestly believed that Harry would go for a pureblood, or was forced by love potion to break up with her. He leaned back in his chair and sighed.

Day's like this made him wish that Grindlewald had killed him back in '45.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Umbridge was upset. She hadn't been able to get Potter to blow up in class. Oh, she had come close. So close. But that dirty little muggleborn had interfered! She would find away to get him to blow. But how? She had insulted Dumbledore, Black, and even Harry himself. She thought long and hard until it struck her. Granger. If she attacked his weakness, then she'd have him right where she wanted him! She grinned evilly as she began to plan on how to get Miss Granger. It wouldn't be easy. That much was for certain.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Term began passing slowly, but Harry was getting more and more frustrated with the bull shit in DADA and inside the school itself. Umbridge had began cracking down on the school, turning it into a prison. She was trying to control everything and everyone. He had even lost Quidditch because of Malfoy! Slimy little bastard had tried to curse him in the hallway after DADA and Umbridge had stormed out and saw Harry with his wand out and an unconscious Malfoy and had assumed he had attacked Malfoy. She banned him on the spot and not even Dumbledore was able to reverse the ban. Hermione had told him that since he was defending himself, he hadn't lost his reward/Christmas gift. Harry swore that he'd pound that little bastard into a pulp if he ever got him on his own. And he could tell that Hermione was also feel the strain and she wasn't any happier with the situation either and had decided to remedy it. And Harry was rather surprised.

"Come on, Harry. We need some one to properly train us. Otherwise, we'll be unprepared when the time comes." She told him.

Harry would have said no then and there, but unfortunately for him, he looked Hermione in the eyes and saw the puppy dog eyes. He broke quicker than a glass window with a rock going through.

"Fine. But we have to find a place to train. I don't want Umbridge to see me and you practicing."

Hermione gave him a slightly guilty look.

"Well...it would actually be more than just me learning from you. Maybe a few more people."

Harry narrowed his eyes.

"Hermione. How many is a few?"

She averted her eyes and began playing with her quill.

"Umm...only...twenty-five I believe. Ron doesn't want to be near you and I have a feeling Ginny will try to seduce you."

Harry's eyes widened as he took in this information.

"Twenty-five people want me to teach them?" He asked, not quite sure he had understood.

She gave him a nervous smile.

"Well...they do want to talk with you, to see what you can teach them, and then they'll make the decision on whether they want to be taught or not."

Harry sighed.

"When are we meeting them?"

He saw Hermione smile brightly as she answered.

"Our next Hogsmeade weekend."

Harry nodded before he narrowed his eyes at her.

"You owe me. Big, Miss Granger."

She smirked.

"I'll include it in your Christmas present Mr. Potter."

-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry found himself walking beside Hermione in Hogsmeade, hand in hand in the cold weather. After a few minutes of walking, Harry decided to find out her destination.

"Where are we going, anyway? The Three Broomsticks?"

"No, it's always packed and really noisy. I've told the others to meet us in the Hog's Head, that other pub. You know the one. It's not on the main road. I think it's a bit... you know... dodgy... but students don't normally go in there, so I don't think we'll be overheard." Hermione answered

Harry had to agree and simply followed the main road until they found the place they were looking for. Harry could understand why it was dodgy. It didn't look too inviting to student. Hermione, however, pulled Harry long and into the pub. He immediately noticed that it was defiantly not like the Three Broomsticks. The Hog's Head bar comprised one small, dingy and very dirty room that smelled strongly of something that might have been goats. The bay windows were so encrusted with grime that very little daylight could permeate the room, which was lit instead with the stubs of candles sitting on rough wooden tables. The floor seemed at first glance to be compressed earth, though as Harry stepped on to it he realized that there was stone beneath what seemed to be the accumulated filth of centuries. Nice. The pair walked over to a table and plopped down, taking in their surroundings when the Barman came over to them.

"What?" he grunted.

"Two Butterbeers, please," said Hermione.

The man summoned two very dusty, very dirty bottles, which he slammed on the table.

"Six Sickles," he said.

"I'll get them," said Harry quickly, passing over the silver.

Harry opened his bottle and sipped it for a moment.

"So, when are they supposed to be meeting us?" Harry asked

Hermione checked her watch and looked anxiously towards the door.

"I told them to be here about now and I'm sure they all know where it is - oh, look, this might be them now." She said, relief in her voice.

The door of the pub had opened. A thick band of dusty sunlight split the room in two for a moment and then vanished, blocked by the incoming rush of a crowd of people. Harry looked at Hermione.

"You need to learn to count better, 'Mione."

She shot him a quick glare before waving them over. First came Neville with Dean and Lavender, who were closely followed by Parvati and Padma Patil with Cho and one of her usually-giggling girlfriends, then Luna Lovegood; followed by Katie Bell, Alicia Spinnet and Angelina Johnson, Colin and Dennis Creevey, Ernie Macmillan, Justin Finch-Fletchley, Hannah Abbott, a Hufflepuff girl with a long plait down her back whose

name Harry did not know; three Ravenclaw boys he was pretty sure were called Anthony

Goldstein, Michael Corner and Terry Boot and, bringing up the rear, Fred and George Weasley with their friend Lee Jordan, all three of whom were carrying large paper bags crammed with Zonko's merchandise. Fred saw Harry and grinned.

"Cheers Harry!"

Harry greeted the twins and waited while everyone ordered their drinks and settled in. Harry turned and looked at Hermione who gave him a confused look.

"You gathered them. You start." He stated, sipping his drink.

Hermione glared at him before standing up and clearing her throat. Harry was actually enjoying himself as he watched her take charge.

"Er," said Hermione, her voice slightly higher than usual out of nerves, "Well - er - hi."

The group focused its attention on her instead, though eyes continued to dart back regularly to Harry.

"Well... um... well, you know why you're here. Um... well, Harry here had the idea - I mean," She paused at Harry's raised eyebrows and sighed. "I had the idea - that it might be good if people who wanted to study Defense Against the Dark Arts - and I mean, really study it, you know, not the rubbish that Umbridge is doing with us because nobody could call that Defense Against the Dark Arts."

"Hear, hear," said Anthony Goldstein.

"Well, I thought it would be good if we, well, took matters into our own hands."

She paused, looked sideways at Harry, who nodded his head in encouragement and went on.

"And by that I mean learning how to defend ourselves properly, not just in theory but doing the real spells -"

"You want to pass your Defense Against the Dark Arts OWL too, though, I bet?" asked Michael Corner, who Harry didn't like, seeing as he was staring at Hermione.

"Of course I do," She stated.

"But more than that, I want to be properly trained in defense because...Lord Voldemort is back."

The reaction was immediate and predictable and down right hilarious to Harry. Cho cough up butterbeer all over her friend, while the Patil twins did some weird twitch, and Neville looked like he'd swallowed a bludger. Hermione wait for everyone to calm down before continuing.

"Yes, well," said Hermione hastily, "moving on... the point is, are we agreed we want to take lessons from Harry?"

There was a murmur of general agreement. Hermione beamed.

"Excellent!"

-X-X-X-X-X-

The rest of the day progressed smoothly for Harry. Hermione had begun working with him in Occlumency and he already noticed a difference. His mind seemed to be more organized and he also seemed to take in information quicker. Also, his dreams about that damn hallway lessened as well. All around, it was a good day. But he still had to find a place for a meeting if the twenty-five people who wanted to learn proper defense. He'd figure something out.

-X-X-X-X-X-

"Are you sure?" Albus asked.

The communications mirror he had displayed what could have been mistaken as his reflection at a glance, but one could see the difference.

"Yes. Potter has gathered himself a little group who plan on really learning defense. I have to agree with the boy."

Albus sighed.

"Aberforth. We must not allow our feelings to cloud us. Harry cannot be allowed to gain too much power. If he does, my plan will be ruined. You know the prophecy."

His brother snorted.

"Rubbish, Albus. The boy needs every bit of power possible. You need to pull your head out of that damned prophecy and start doing the right thing. And what your doing to Potter will only hurt him in the end."

Albus rubbed his left temple.

"Aberforth. You can't understand how important it is that Harry remain under my control. Any deviation could send him into the darkness and there will be no way to bring him back to the light."

Aberforth looked at his brother sadly.

"Your treading a line here, Albus. Your manipulating him for your own selfish needs and your going to hurt us all. Have you ever considered how Potter will react once he finds out what you've been doing?"

Albus paused before he answered.

"He won't."

Aberforth frowned.

"He'll find out Albus. I only hope I'm not around to see what happens when he does."

His brother closed the connection and Albus quietly contemplated what he was going to do. Everything was spiraling out of his control and he would not stand for it. But how was he supposed to act now that everything was in motion? His answer: He couldn't. Not unless killing was an option and it was most certainly not an option.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry looked at Dobby with curiosity.

"Hey, Dobby? Do you know a place where I can fight about twenty-eight or so people in that Umbridge won't be able to find?"

Dobby paused before his eyes light up.

"Dobby knows the perfect place, sir!" he said happily, Dobby heard tell of it from the other house-elves when he came to Hogwarts, sir. It is known by us as the Come and Go Room, sir, or else as the Room of Requirement!"

"Why?" said Harry curiously.

"Because it is a room that a person can only enter when they have real need of it. Sometimes it is there, and sometimes it is not, but when it appears, it is always equipped for the seeker's needs. Dobby has used it, sir, when Winky has been very drunk. He has hidden her in the Room of Requirement and he has found antidotes to Butterbeer there, and a nice elf-sized bed to settle her on while she sleeps it off, sir... and Dobby knows Mr. Filch has found extra cleaning materials there when he has run short, sir, and -"

"And if you really needed a bathroom," said Harry, suddenly remembering something

Dumbledore had said at the Yule Ball the previous Christmas, "would it fill itself with chamber pots?"

"Dobby expects so, sir," said Dobby, nodding earnestly. "It is a most amazing room, sir."

"How many people know about it?" said Harry, sitting up straighter in his chair.

"Very few, sir. Mostly people stumbles across it when they needs it, sir, but often they never finds it again, for they do not know that it is always there waiting to be called into service, sir."

"It sounds brilliant," said Harry, his heart racing. "It sounds perfect, Dobby. When can you show me where it is?"

"Any time, Harry Potter, sir," said Dobby, looking delighted at Harry's enthusiasm. "We could go now, if you like!"

Harry thought for a moment but decided against it.

"Not tonight. But, can you tell me how to get to it?"

Harry listened as Dobby explained it and the next day, he took Hermione up to see the room. She was thrilled and decided that Harry deserved a reward and the two stayed in the room for close to an hour before they finally left, both looking rather disheveled, and both sporting large grins as they made their way back to the common room.

-X-X-X-X-X-

DADA class the next day pushed Harry to the limits as Umbridge managed to give Hermione detention for simply stating that theory was good and all, but practices would help as well. So eleven that night, Harry was sitting up, waiting for her to come back to the common room. He had been absentmindedly poking the fire when he felt a pair of arms snake around him and the smell of vanilla reached him. Harry looked back to see the smiling face of Hermione.

"Hi."

"Hey. How'd detention go?" He asked.

He saw her face flicker for a moment before her smile returned.

"She just had me do lines." She said calmly.

Harry rose from his seat and took her hand in his and was about to sit down when he saw her wince.

"Hermione. What's wrong?" He asked.

She tried to pull her hand back.

"Oh, nothing. My hand is just a little sore is all."

Harry kept his grip and turned her hand over. He could see the reddened lines on the back of her hand and he could just make out five words. I will not talk back. Harry quickly became very, very angry.

"What did she do to you?"

"Harry-" She started, but Harry cut her off.

"What did she do to you that did this? I thought you said she had you do lines."

She looked at him sadly.

"She had me use a blood quill. They use the user's own blood to write with. Normally, it is only to be used to write with once, mostly for signatures and such by the Goblins at Gringotts. But repeated

usage with the same hand will cut the writing into the hand, making it permanent."

Harry rose to his feet, grabbing his wand before Hermione stopped him.

"Don't Harry. Please." She begged.

Harry looked at her, a flood of emotions on his face.

"And what would you have me do?"

He could see her tears as they started to build.

"Stay with me. Please. Stay here and hold me until morning."

Harry slowly put his wand down and sat down with her, wrapping his arms around her.

"Alright. I'll stay, but only because you asked so nicely."

Hermione gave a watery chuckle before resting her head on his shoulder.

"Thank you."

"Anytime."

-X-X-X-X-X-

Umbridge entered her classroom the next day and was disturbed to find that Mr. Potter was looking at the front of the room with a neutral expression, though she could sense his anger. She was sure he would have reacted to what had happened to his little girlfriend. Damn. She'd have to contact Cornelius and see if he could give her a few more decrees so that she could squash Potter and ensure order was placed over Hogwarts and the wizarding world itself.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Albus sighed. He couldn't do it anymore. He had to come clean. After looking over everything that had happened over the years, he had to admit that he had caused far more damage than anyone else

could. He slowly pulled his wand out of his robes and tapped a piece of parchment in front of him. On it was a list of different spells, trackers, and other things he done to keep Harry under his control.

'But he's not anymore is he? Clever boy.' He thought with a smile as he slowly began to remove his spells from Harry.

'Perhaps Alastor is right. I need to let him take charge of his own life. And now...well...Harry will no longer have me trying to manipulate him. it's time I took a more active role in training him. I only hope he forgives a stupid, foolish oldman.'

He had finally came to the conclusion that he wasn't part of the prophecy, but he was sure he knew who was.

His eyes traveled to the student roster once more and he glanced at Harry's name with a single gold line connecting his to Miss Grangers.

Engaged.

They were the Warriors of the Light. He just had to get them trained to fulfill the prophecy. And that would be where the fun begins.

Chapter VII

Behind Closed Doors

Harry and Hermione woke the next day and made their way to the Great Hall for breakfast when Professor McGonagall stopped them.

"The Headmaster would like to see you both in his office. Password is 'Lemon Drop'."

The two nodded and headed off to see what he wanted. They passed by Ron and Ginny, both of whom looked pissed that their love potions hadn't worked. Harry made a mental note to speak with Arthur about this, but he worried what would happen if Molly found out. It wouldn't be pretty, that was sure. After several minutes and climbing a few staircases, Harry and Hermione found themselves just outside Dumbledore's office. Harry glanced over to Hermione who nodded. A short knock was followed by a quick reply.

"Enter."

The two teens entered the office and saw Dumbledore looking at the pair intently. He asked them to sit and offered a lemon drop that both politely refused.. He sighed as he set the bowl down and looked over the pair.

"I suppose your both curious as to why you're here, correct?"

Both nodded and he continued.

"It's simple, really. I'm tired. I'm tired of trying to manipulate you, Harry. I'm tired of trying to make you take the paths I want you to so I know the outcome. I'm tired of holding things away from you. The time has come for that to stop."

Harry blinked in surprise.

"What do you mean?" He asked.

"I mean, I'm done with trying to turn you into a weapon. I'm tired of condemning you to darkness just for my own means. No more."

Harry was confused.

"Sir...what's going on?"

Dumbledore sighed again.

"What is going on, Harry, is that I am stepping off the frontlines, so to speak. My time as a Warrior for the Light is over with, yet I stubbornly hung on, trying to will myself to be there, fighting besides those who face evil. I've gotten too old for that. It is time to pass the torch, so to speak, to you and your generation."

Harry felt his eyes widen as Hermione gripped his hand.

"Sir. Just what have you done to me in the past fourteen years?" He asked.

The oldman looked at him sadly.

"I have made plans to keep you on a set path. Everything from making your relatives swear to take you in and keep you from getting attached to them, to trying to find away for Miss Weasley to be with you."

"What?" Hermione asked in a shocked tone.

"I felt that if you died and was in a relationship with Harry, then he would have turned to the darkness, something that we did not need to happen. But that plan is scratched because nothing can change it now."

"What about first year? The steps taken to guard the stone?"

"To test you and see where your strength and those who sided with you were. I wanted to see if we would have to replace Miss Granger or Mister Weasley if they were of no help to you. As we can see today, only Miss Granger has stayed because Mister Weasley proved he was untrustworthy."

Harry felt his anger rise.

"Second year, with the diary?" He asked.

"Actually, that was a surprise. Tom placed several suppression wards on it to mask it's presence. But I did have a feeling it was a basilisk after we found Mister Creevy."

"And third year. Did you know Sirius was innocent?"

Dumbledore nodded.

"Yes. I did. But I didn't know where Peter was. I needed Sirius to force him to show himself. The fact that you, Miss Granger and Mister Weasley acted before I could prevented me from getting him. Even with my contact and position, even I was unable to overrule Barty Crouch."

Harry wanted to punch the old man right in his crooked nose. But Hermione gave his hand a gentle squeeze that calmed him down.

"What about the tournament? Did Harry really have to compete, or was there something you could have done?"

Dumbledore paused.

"I'm not really sure. The contract was binding and would have sapped him of his Magic had he not competed, so yes he had to compete, though I could have taken steps to help him during the tasks, namely instructors and such, but I saw how well you were teaching him and left you two to your own devices. I am happy to say my faith was indeed rewarded."

Harry took a deep breath and looked at him with a calm expression.

"So you are only responsible for my first year? And for keeping the Dursleys from getting attached to me and forcing Ginny on me, right?" Harry asked.

Dumbledore nodded.

"Yes. That sums everything up."

Harry nodded his head before he leapt up, trying to get to Dumbledore, to beat the oldman with his very own hands but Hermione pulled him back to his seat. It took everything Harry had to not scream with rage and try to throttle the oldman. Instead, he

concentrated on Hermione's touch and the warm feeling her hands gave him. He opened his eyes and gave Dumbledore a hard look.

"I'm not going to forgive you right away. You'll have to earn my forgiveness."

Dumbledore smiled.

"My dear boy, I would have been disappointed if you had taken all this at face value. Now, as for the reason I called you here-" Dumbledore paused and looked at Hermione's hand with curiosity. "May I inquire what happened to you hand, Miss Granger?" He asked.

Hermione shook her head and quickly put her hand in her robes.

"From what I saw, it looked like you had the words 'I will not talk back' etched into the back of your hand. There is only one instrument I am aware of that can do that. And I'm pretty sure that the use of blood quills is not part of the accepted method for punishments."

Hermione looked at the floor as Harry tried to comfort her.

"Do not worry. I will deal with Professor Umbridge. As much as I wish I could sack her from the school, I cannot."

"Why? You're the Headmaster!" Harry stated.

Dumbledore nodded.

"That is true. But do to the fact that she is employed by the ministry, I have no control over her posting here. Only those hired by the headmaster may be discharged by the headmaster. That is the rule."

Harry growled in frustration as Dumbledore continued to ponder what he would do.

"I suggest we move on. My staffing problem will have to wait. As is, there is something I want you both to see." He said as he pulled a pensive out from under his desk.

They watched as he gave it a quick stir with his wand before a ghostly figure of Professor Trelawney rose out of the pensive, her voice creepy and foreboding.

"The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches... born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies... and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not...the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies...His fall comes as the seventh month dies, but peace will not last...as darkness approaches, reborn from death...two warriors shall be chosen...one of courage, strength, and passion...the other of knowledge, cunning, and of pure heart...Both Warriors of the light Shall rise to vanquish the Dark Lord...they wield a power he knows not... The two will stand side by side against the darkness, or should they stand alone, fall to eternal Darkness...One cannot survive without the other."

Harry looked at the pensive as the ghost of the Professor lowered back into it and vanished from sight. The room was silent as Harry tried to process what he had just heard, but Hermione seemed to absorb it quickly.

"Professor...what does it mean?" She asked softly.

Dumbledore closed his eyes momentarily before he responded.

"It is a prophecy made dealing with Voldemort and Harry in the first portion. It speaks of Voldemort's fall at the end of July. Harry's birthday is on the 31st of the said month. His parents had defied Voldemort three times. Once in school, and twice in battles between the Order and the Death Eaters. Come to think of it, James was able to beat Voldemort in a duel, but had to leave once his reinforcements arrived."

Harry smiled at that thought. Seems his Dad was a hell of a fighter. But Hermione needed more information.

"And the last bit? The part about the two warriors?" She asked.

"After several years, and pushing my ego aside, I believe the Warriors of Light are both you and Harry. You see, you both exhibit the characteristics of the two warriors."

Harry agreed with Dumbledore about that, but he still had no idea what he was supposed to do.

"What do we do now?"

Dumbledore looked at him with a serious expression.

"We prepare for War, but first, I want to congratulate you on your engagement to each other." He said with a smile.

"WHAT?"

Dumbledore looked at them curiously.

"The records show that the pair of you are engaged. Have been since the beginning of this past summer if I read this right."

Hermione gasped before she looked to Harry.

"You did propose that night. And I did agree."

Harry opened his mouth but smirked. It didn't seem so bad now.

"Well. This does save me the trouble of asking again."

Hermione looked at him sternly.

"Oh, no you don't Harry James Potter. Your going to do it the right way and to start, you will ask my father for his blessing."

Harry suddenly felt fear as he looked to Dumbledore.

"Sir. You can help me, right?"

Dumbledore smiled.

"Afraid not. Your in territory that few men have dared traveled. And I, good sir, have never had the courage to explore it. Your on your own."

"I find your lack of help disturbing." Harry stated as he fumed at the lack of support.

He guessed he'd deal with it when the time came. He just hoped her father wouldn't kill him for asking.

-X-X-X-X-X-

In the span of a month much was taught and passed on to Harry and the Defenders Alight, something George choose as a play on Hermione's original choice of Defender of Light. Even though they stuck with Hermione's idea, they chose to use the letters DA, something Hermione wasn't too happy with but she didn't complain. The days started to become cooler and darker with winter approaching and the castle was in full swing with the transition between fall and winter. Most of the student body was going home for Christmas, including Harry and Hermione. When Harry had asked why she wasn't going to her parents, she responded that they were going on a private holiday and she still had to give Harry his gift. Harry himself had gotten her a gift and was pleased he's be able to spend another Christmas with Hermione. It wasn't until he started to think about Christmas that he remembered that their anniversary was coming up, and fast. Using all the contacts he had for help with women, which amounted to Sirius and Remus, he managed to get her a simple silver gold necklace with a teardrop shaped heart made of ruby. He decided that it would double as a Christmas gift, which is what he told her. She agreed that it made sense and was happy tat he remembered the date. So now Harry was simply trying to get to sleep the day before they would leave for Christmas at Grimmauld Place. His dreams were confusing to him. He was slithering on the ground, in a long hallway it looked like. He was looking for something. But what? A sudden movement caught his attention. Harry turned his head in the direction and paused. Harry put out his tongue and he tasted the man's scent on the air. He was alive but drowsy, sitting in front of a door at the end of the corridor. Harry longed to bite the man, but he must master the impulse. He had more important work to do. He tried to slither past him, but he caught the cloak the man had on. The man jumped to his feet; and Harry saw his vibrant, blurred outline towering above him, saw a wand withdrawn from a belt. He had no choice... he reared high from the floor and struck once, twice, three times, plunging his fangs deeply into the man's flesh, feeling his ribs splinter beneath his jaws, feeling the warm gush of blood. The man was yelling in pain and then he fell silent as he slumped backwards against the wall his blood was splattering on to the floor. Harry's

eyes snapped open and he fought the urge to puke as he rolled out of the bed, Neville standing over him, concerned for his friend.

"Harry! You okay?"

"Get McGonagall. Now." He panted as he wiped the sweat from his forehead.

Neville paused but hurried out of the room to get the professor. All the while, Harry was aware that the other boys were looking at him with worry. After several minutes, McGonagall arrived and placed a hand on his shoulder.

"Are you alright Potter?" She asked.

He shook his head.

"No. I need to see the headmaster. I saw...an attack on one of the members where it's hidden." He said as cryptically as he could.

He knew she got the message when she helped him to his feet and helped him down the stairs where a concerned Hermione waited.

"Miss Granger. Return to your dorm."

"No. Let her come with us. She'll hear about it anyway." Harry stated as he tried his best to stop shaking.

McGonagall agreed and the three headed to the Headmasters office to tell him that Harry had probably just killed Arthur Weasley.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Hermione nibbled her lower lip as she waited for Sirius to enter the kitchen. She had a plan for Christmas night, but needed his help to make sure things went smoothly. It was but a few hours ago that he had went up to speak with Harry to let him know Arthur was alive and would recover. She had waited downstairs, unsure of what to tell the older man, but she didn't have time to think about it before he entered the kitchen looking run down. He dropped into his chair and sighed.

"Well...he's better now. But it'll take a lot more than this to cheer him up." He muttered, reaching for a Butterbeer.

Hermione paused as she opened her mouth, trying to think of how to word her request.

"Sirius. I need you help. I have a...present for Harry that I want to give him on Christmas. But I need you to get him out of his room for thirty minutes tonight so the wards have time to charge." She said in a rush, turning red.

Sirius slowly lowered his drink and looked her in the eyes.

"Hermione. By present...you mean...?"

She nodded, making Sirius lean back in his chair and give her a thoughtful expression.

"Alright. Suppose I help you. Why do you want to give such an important thing to Harry?"

"Because...I love him. I want to stay with him for the rest of my life. I want to be the mother of his children. I want him and only him." She told him with such emotion, that he smiled at her commitment to his Godson.

Sirius nodded his head in understanding, taking a quick sip of his drink before setting it back down.

"I know of the engagement, and I understand how you both feel about each other, so...I'll help."

Hermione sighed in relief.

"Thank you. I owe you one."

Sirius grinned.

"Just seeing him happy will be enough thanks. So...what will you do in those thirty minutes?"

"Silencing wards. I mean, yes, I know it's only the three of us here at the moment, but Remus and Tonks are planning to come over for Christmas, and I'd rather none of you hear us."

Sirius nodded, happy that she had consideration to worry about his discomfort at hearing Harry lose his virginity.

"Alright. I'll give you the thirty minutes. HARRY!" He called.

Hermione took her cue and rushed up stairs to prepare. Christmas would be a very important day for her. And she'd be damned if anything ruined it.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry woke Christmas morning rather slowly. He smiled as he enjoyed the warmth of the bed. But like all good things...they get better.

"Harry! Happy Christmas!" Hermione called happily as she leapt onto his bed, pressing her lips on his.

Harry blinked a few times before smiling and embracing the brown haired woman he had in his bed.

"Happy Christmas to you as well. Wanna let me up?" He asked playfully.

Hermione giggled and rolled over enough for Harry to roll out of bed. With a stretch he faced Hermione and smiled. She looked so adorable curled up on the bed, smiling while she buried her face in his pillow.

"Come on 'Mione. Let's go see what we got for Christmas."

Hermione left rather regretfully from the room and followed him downstairs where they were assaulted by Remus and Tonks with hugs. After a few minutes, Sirius called them to the tree where they all sat down and looked at the tree eagerly. Remus had to push Sirius away since the man wanted to shake all his boxes, trying to determine what was inside them.

"Alright. Lets see. First one is for...Sirius." Remus handed him a medium sized box.

Sirius took the box and tore it open and pulled out a new jumper that had a grims head on it. The man grinned and pulled it on over his white tee he was wearing. Remus pulled over the next box.

"Hermione, this one is from Tonks and I."

Hermione opened it and her eyes began to tear up. It was a book written by Merlin himself and it was basically a manual on wandless magic. She thanked them with a hug, Remus pulled up the next one.

"Harry. This is from Mr. and Mrs. Granger."

Harry ended up getting a muggle magic set that everyone thought was funny as hell. He grinned and made a mental note to get them back for the gag gift. Next up Remus surprised everyone by proposing to Tonks. The normal klutz launched herself at Remus in happiness and after the pulled apart for air, they continued.

Sirius got a few other gifts like a new suit, and a wand holster. Tonks got an all expenses paid trip to a spa in Diagon alley. And Remus got a few books on defeating dark creatures which he was very happy with. Now, it was Harry's turn to give Hermione her gift. He handed her a simple envelope.

"Read it out loud." He told her, grinning.

Hermione took the letter out and began to read it.

"Dear Harry, I am rather surprised you wrote us separately from Hermione. She always seems to include a message from you in her letters. Though after I read your request, I can understand why. And, yes, I do believe this will be an excellent gift for her for Christmas. She's been through so much and both Miranda and I know how much you two love each other. While we wish you two would wait, we understand the situation. So, Harry, to answer your question, I, Jack Edward Granger, do hereby give you my blessings to marry my little princess. Keep her happy Harry. Oh, and welcome to the family, son.

With love,

Mum and Dad."

She finished reading the letter, wiping the tears from her eyes and what she saw made her gasp in shock.

Harry had dropped to one knee with a small box open with a simple silver gold band and a small diamond on it.

"I know we are already technically engaged, but, I figured I do it the right way. Hermione Jane Granger. Will you make me the happiest man in the world, even rivaling Remus over there, and agree to marry me?" He asked.

She had tears of joy streaking down her cheeks she nodded. Harry grinned and slipped the ring on her finger and just after he did, she knocked him on his back in the same manner that Tonks had knocked Remus over. After a few minutes, she helped him back up where Tonks pulled her aside, congratulating her while Remus and Sirius gave him the customary male congratulations. As in "When's the bachelor party?" Harry laughed and the small household went back to opening gifts. Hermione pulled a foot long box out from under the tree and handed it to him. Harry opened it and what he saw made him want to cry in happiness. It was the memories of his parents wedding and the year that he had with them before Voldemort took them from him. He looked up at her and pulled her into a kiss.

"Thank you. This...this is a priceless gift. I don't know how I can thank you for this."

She smiled.

"You don't have to." She said as she creased his face.

"This is some reward for not killing Umbridge. And I must say, this is defiantly worth it."

Hermione smiled and nodded but she was thinking something completely different in her head.

"Wait until after tonight. Then tell me which gift you like better."

The day passed smoothly with several funny points including Remus and Sirius getting drunk and trying to sing Christmas carols or when Harry pranked Sirius by changing the color of his robes to Hufflepuff colors after said Black thought it would be funny to try to shrink his private parts. Needless to say, it was funny watching the man strut around in yellow for awhile. As night approached, the two drunks sobered up and Sirius sent Hermione a wink that made her blush. She turned to Harry who was still looking through a book that Remus had gotten him about defense.

"Harry?"

He didn't even look up.

"Hmm?"

"Could you come upstairs with me? I have one more present for you and I need you help with it."

Harry nodded and marked his place in the book and followed her up the steps. Once they were gone, Remus sent Sirius a questioning look.

"What was that about Padfoot?"

Sirius smirked.

"Harry is going to get a...special gift tonight."

Tonks covered her mouth with her hands in surprise.

"You mean...?" She whispered.

Sirius nodded his head.

"She was dead set on giving herself to him tonight. I only hope the poor bloke knows what to do and what goes where."

Remus chuckled.

"If he's anything like James, and he is, he'll asked Hermione for instructions."

Sirius laughed.

"Ha! Remember what he told us? How he got Lilly to help him figure it out?"

Remus chuckled and did his best impression of a confused James.

"Hey...Care to show me around you garden?"

Sirius fell over laughing at this point as Remus fought to remain up right from the laughter while Tonks was hopeless as she clutched her side, laughing too hard to stand.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry entered his bedroom and looked around confused. If she hide a gift in here, he wondered how she did it. Harry allowed himself to be lead to the bed where she pushed him down to sit.

"Wait here. I'll go get you present."

"Can't wait to unwrap it." He said happily, not realizing just what the gift was.

Hermione blushed as she turned away.

"I'm sure you can't. Now, no peeking. I'll be back soon."

Harry watched her retreat into the bathroom and decided to wait patiently and leaned back on the bed. He just wondered what she had got him. Meanwhile, Hermione was hurriedly pulling her supplies out of the duffel back she stashed in the bathroom attached to Harry's room and changed quickly. She decided to wear a simple dark blue silk robe that clung to her figure with just her bra and knickers on, which were a matching color. Hermione walked to the mirror and looked herself over. If this didn't get the boy drooling, she didn't know what else would. She pulled out her wand and whispered a few charms, one to seal the room from entry and to prevent sound from escaping, and another to prevent pregnancy. She knew that no form of birth control, magic or otherwise, was perfect. But unlike the muggle birth control, this charm was effective close to ninety-eight percent of the time. She could live with those

odds. Taking a deep breath, she opened the door and leaned against the door as alluring as she could possibly muster.

(LEMON STARTS HERE. BE WARNED. I HAVEN'T WRITTEN ONE IN A WHILE, BUT I THINK IT TURNED OUT WELL)

Harry, while Hermione had been in the bathroom had been staring at the ceiling, counting the deformities but gave up once he counted forty-six three times. He heard the bathroom door open but didn't think to look over. If he did, his jaw would have dropped and he probably would have become bug eyed at the sight.

"Harry?"

He heard Hermione call to him...but it was different this time. It sounded...seductive and extremely sexy. He looked over to the door and immediately was in a sitting position as he took in her sight. He looked over her body. Long slender legs up to her small waist up to her decent sized bust and finally, to her face. This took Harry by storm. She had passion and lust in her eyes and love. Harry looked back over her body, gulping as he took in how well the thin robe helped to project her figure. She gave him a seductive smile.

"Like what you see, Harry?" She asked.

Her voice sent his blood boiling and running south. He quickly nodded his head. Hermione took courage from his reaction and slowly and sensually walked over to him, swaying her hips before she stopped in front of him.

"Would you like to unwrap your gift?" She asked.

Harry nodded and rose to his feet. With shaky hands, he undid the tie around her waist, holding the robes closed. Hermione simply let him slip the robes off of her and saw his eyes go wide as he took in her appearance.

"Your not done yet." She whispered to him.

Harry slowly reached behind her and somehow, in his hormone induced state, unclasped the bra, with a some difficulty and some help from Hermione. Once it was dropped, he felt his erection throb as he took in the sight of a topless Hermione.

"Did...did you use an enlargement charm?"

She gave him a guilty expression.

"A small one. Just a half a cup. I'm a comfortable C now. Is that a problem?" She asked.

Harry shook his head.

"No. Just curious." He muttered as he ran a hand over her sides and up to her breasts. She felt the heart from his hands as he cupped them and gave an involuntary shudder at the touch. Harry continued to explore these to new locations and ran his hands over them, feeling the hardened nipples and the supple feel of them. Hermione, while enjoying the ministrations, had other plans for him than just letting him feel her boobs. She grabbed his hands and brought them down to her panties. Once there, she let him push them down and kicked them aside, standing completely nude in all her glory before Harry.

"Come now, Harry. How can you enjoy your present if your over dressed?" She gave a quick flick of her wand and Harry found himself completely nude. "Better. Now, let's take this to the bed."

Harry followed her to the comfortable bed and felt himself pushed on his back while she straddled him. Harry could feel the wetness from her pussy and was intrigued to say the least. Before he could ask any questions, she leaned down and captured his lips with her own. While he was in momentary shock, she shot her tongue into his mouth and began a wrestling match with it for several minutes, moaning as she melted into the kiss. She pulled back and looked down at him, smiling.

"So...Harry. Do you like your gift so far?"

He grinned.

"Enjoying it toughly."

"Good. Because we're not done yet."

Harry watched as she scooted back over his erect penis and gripped him firmly. He cocked an eyebrow.

"Shouldn't I be on top? And...don't we need foreplay or something?" He asked.

"I want you in me in one shot, Potter. Not trying to figure out where to stick this seven inch erection of yours. And as for the foreplay, I got myself ready in the bathroom so we could get right to the main event. Now stop trying to interrupt me. I have a gift to give you."

Harry reached out and placed his hands on her waist, giving her some support as she positioned herself over him. Before she did anything else, she locked eyes with him.

"This is going to hurt me. A lot. So just don't do anything till I tell you, okay?"

Harry nodded slowly as she began to lower herself. He felt her openings give way to him and barley in, he felt a barrier of some sort. He looked up at her and saw her take a deep breath before lifting up slightly and then slamming herself down, impaling herself on his member. Harry gasped and threw his head back at the new sensation. It was warm, tight, and moist. He looked up and saw her whimpering as she tried to push the pain aside.

"You okay?" He asked quietly as he creased her cheek.

Hermione bit her lip and paused. After a moment, the pain subsided.

"Yeah. Just...it hurt more than I thought it would. Just...let me get used to this."

Harry nodded and waited. After a second or two, she rose up before slamming herself down again, letting out a moan at the sensations shooting through her body. Harry had once again, thrown his head back and clenched his eyes shut. This was the most incredible thing he had ever felt. She slowly began to get her rhythm, raising herself and slamming down, baring the throbbing erection in as far as it could go, each time, she felt it hit deep inside her, occasionally reaching her cervix. Harry, on instinct, pulled his hips back as far as he could and slammed them forward as she came down, the sounds of flesh slamming together aroused him even more.

"FUCK!" She gasped from the new feeling, her eyes clenched tight.

Harry proceeded to repeat his last move and received the same response.

"Oh, God! Ke-keep doing that Harry. D-don't you dare stooopppppp-!" Her words were drowned out by Harry taking her advice.

Slowly, the pair got their rhythm, Hermione began to whimper and moan as Harry continued to slam into her with increasing speed and power. He knew most teenage males had very poor stamina the first time, but he had lasted ten minutes so far, which was rather impressive, before he felt himself building to the final.

"God. Hermione! Your so tight!" He grunted as he slammed into her for all he was worth, hands gripping her breasts, playing with her rock hard nipples as she cried out his name again.

"I-I'm gonna cum!"

Hermione heard what he said and sped up herself.

"Do it! Blow inside me! Oh God, YES, YES, YES! CUM IN ME HARRY! PLEASE GOD CUM IN ME!" She screamed as she built up to her own release.

And she was glad that she had...prepared herself prior to coming out of the bathroom. Otherwise, she'd leave only partly satisfied. But her thoughts were blown away as she felt Harry tense up before his penis gave a massive twich inside her sending her over the edge as well, both cumming at the same time, calling out to one another. Hermione collapsed into him, smiling with happiness, feeling whole. She could hear his heart trying to calm itself from the cardio they just did along with his attempt to get his breathing under control. Some part of her mind as telling her she need to shower, that she was sweaty and had blood on her from where her barrier had been broken. After five minutes of simply trying to recover themselves, the two teens decided that a shower was in order followed by bed. Harry, being the gentleman he was, lifted Hermione off the bed and took her to the shower and helped her clean herself up before taking her back to the bed. The raven haired wizard took a quick shower and dried off as quickly s he could and joined his fiancé under the covers.

Hermione rested her head on his shoulder while he pulled her close to him and simply smiled. The two lovers drifted off into sleep in each other's arms.

(AN: I know...I'm a little rusty on writing this. If it wasn't up to your expectations, I'm sorry. Other than that, I hope you enjoyed the chapter.)

Chapter VIII

This All A Dream?

Harry woke the next morning feeling extremely well rested. He yawned and began to stretch, but froze. Something or someone was lying across him. Harry slowly opened his eyes and saw a blurry bush of brown in front of him.

"Who has brown hair? Wait a minute...Hermione!"

Harry began to panic before he calmed himself and tried to figure out how he ended up in this situation. He looked up at the ceiling as Hermione let out a happy sigh and snuggled up closer to him.

"Okay. I remember yesterday morning, proposing to her. Alright...good so far. Next, I turned Sirius's robes yellow after he tried to shrink my Hampton. Thank God for Hermione and that shield charm. Okay...next...was...hmm...Oh...right. She brought me up here because she still had a present for me. She went into the bathroom to get it and came out...in...Oh my."

Little light bulbs popped on inside his head as he came to the conclusion that he had lost his virginity last night to Hermione. He let a smile begin to cross his face as he pulled the girl closer to him. He heard her whimper as he adjusted himself, and she immediately pulled herself tight against him, intertwining their legs. Harry felt his heart melt at the sight he beheld. She looked adorable when she was asleep. So relaxed and at peace with the world. Harry thought he had an angel with him. He simply laid there, watching her sleep, admiring the beauty he had with him. He only had to wait ten minutes before she began to stir. Her eyes slowly opened and she let out an absolutely adorable yawn before smiling up at Harry, a sleepy look on her face.

"Good morning." She said softly.

Harry returned her smile.

"Good morning to you too."

She stretched and Harry suddenly found her on top of him, kissing him gently. Hermione pulled back and smiled.

"Seems you want another go." She said playfully as she felt his arousal on her rear.

Harry blushed.

"I can't help it. It's a natural response when you have such a gorgeous woman laying nude on top of you."

Hermione smiled and rubbed herself on his arousal.

"Your not the only one who wants another round."

"Make sure the doors are sealed."

Hermione gave a flick of her wand before tossing it aside and attacking Harry with a hungry frenzy.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Sirius was sitting at the table, looking through the Daily Prophet when two rather disheveled teens entered the room. His grin began to grow as he watched them sit down, side by side and start eating.

"So...Hermione. The reducing charm do anything to him or did you manage to prevent it?" He asked casually as he looked through the paper.

Remus chuckled as both teens blushed. He and Sirius had planned for this and it felt good to be able to tease someone again, especially James' son.

"Judging by the blushes and the glow she seems to have, I don't think it did anything, Padfoot. Seems she was intent on having little Harry untouched by magic."

Sirius grinned at his old pal and looked back at the fidgeting teens.

"Who lead?" He asked.

Harry blinked, not understanding the question while Hermione blushed.

"It had to be Hermione. Harry is too much like James." Remus pointed out.

"And just what does that mean?" Harry asked.

Remus chuckled while Sirius explained it to him.

"Your father may have been good at many things Harry, but sex was not one of them from what Lilly told us. He had to have your mother give him step by step instructions damn near to figure it out."

Harry turned red and looked away mumbling about intrusive Godfathers while Hermione turned a nice shade of tomato red causing Sirius to laugh very hard.

"Like father like son like Grandson! Three Potters in a row!" He roared with laughter.

Remus followed suit, falling onto the ground, holding his sides as Sirius banged his fist on the table. All the noise prompted Tonks to see what was going on. She saw the two grown men laughing like little boys while Harry and Hermione were turning different shades of red as yet unnamed.

"Let me guess. You two are getting teased." It wasn't a question.

Harry nodded and gave Sirius a glare. Hermione, meanwhile was giving Tonks a pleading look. The older woman nodded in understanding, having been there before and gave Remus a scary look.

"Remus John Lupin. If you don't stop teasing these two, you will be getting no sex for a month and will sleep on the couch." She said in a no nonsense tone.

The 'Kicked Puppy' look on Remus' face was priceless and it made Hermione and Harry feel better that one of them had been dealt with. The way Lupin began sputtering his indignation at the proposed punishment caused Sirius to laugh so hard, he had tears streaming down his face.

"AHAHAHA! Your so whipped Moony!"

Remus scowled before he smirked at him.

"I know. Kinky, isn't it?" He asked with a perverted smirk on his face.

Sirius' eyes threatened to pop out of his skull as Tonks swatted his arm, while Remus tried not to laugh at his friend. Harry and Hermione were looking at their former Professor with new light. And a look of shock.

"He didn't mean it." Tonks told them, blushing as she pulled the old werewolf out of the room to deal with his big mouth.

Sirius shook his head and looked back at the teens with seriousness.

"Alright. Teasing over. But I want to let you two know I am happy that you are together. And I think it's time I should you something." He said as he fished a journal out of his pocket and tossed it to Harry.

"That is your mother's dream journal. She had it since she was in Divination, when it was taught by an actual seer. Go ahead and open it up."

Harry cracked open the book with shaking hands, looking at his mother's hand writing for the first time. It seemed he took after her with more than just his eyes. Harry began to look over the first page.

"September 3rd 1973, Dream 1. As instructed by Professor Aurora, I have begun keeping a dream journal. And last night's was a very peculiar dream. I was sitting in a bed room, holding the most adorable baby boy. He had black hair and green eyes like mine. And he was giggling happily as I spun around with him in my arms. He was such a cute baby! After a few moments of playing with him, the door had opened and a man with glasses and the same black hair entered the room, smiling fondly at us. I wonder who he is? He seems so handsome and if the similar looks about the baby are anything, this man must be my husband and the baby our son. I wonder if this means anything?"

Harry knew instantly who she was referring to. Hermione held a hand over her mouth as she finished looking over the entry as well. Harry flipped through the pages looking through them, until he found one his mother had put a star besides.

"January 22nd 1974, Dream 154. I had that dream again. The one of my death. And I know who the black haired man is. It's James Potter of all people. Such an arrogant prat! He's nothing but a bully! But I'm getting off topic. In the dream, James and I are downstairs, playing with Harry. It's Halloween night, based on the calendar. A knock on the door is heard. James goes to answer it. I feel anxiety as he opens the door. Next thing that happens is he's yelling "Lilly! It's him! Take Harry and run! I'll try to hold him off!" I grabbed our son, and rushed up the stairs locking the door. I hear a spell, Avada Kedavra and I know James is dead. Harry begins to cry, but I managed to clam him down, just before the door is blown open. The man, pale and evil looking with red eyes and a snake like face tells me to stand aside. I plead with him to not kill my son, my Harry. He sneers and uses the killing curse on me. And then I wake up. What does this mean? Am I to die on October 31st, 1981 at the hands of some evil wizard? I must speak with Professor Aurora. This dream has happened too much to be a coincidence."

"She knew. She knew she was going to die." Harry muttered.

Sirius slowly nodded his head. He had seen Lilly's dream journal when she had started to notice that her dreams during school were coming to pass. That is one of the reasons why he was on his way to the Potters that night. To prevent their deaths.

"Look at the last entry for Hogwarts. May 26th, 1978."

Harry did as his Godfather instructed and began reading.

"May 26th, 1978. I've stopped numbering the dreams now. Professor Aurora finished this assignment months ago. But I had a very good dream last night. It was of Harry's wedding! He looks so handsome and smart in his suit. He's got to be at least eighteen by the looks of him. He looks so much like James. James...I can't wait to start my life with him. He's turned around massively this year. He's not arrogant anymore! I know! It's got to be a Hogwarts miracle! Off topic again...back to the dream. Well, Harry is the spitting image of James. Unruly black hair and glasses and that heart melting smile. So charismatic. As I watch I look around for myself and James and am saddened that I cannot see us anywhere in the crowd. It must mean that we aren't alive. That hurts to know I'll never see my son get married or meet the woman who stole his heart and made him

so happy. As I watch, two people walk down the aisle, one of them, a man in a simple black suit with brown hair that is rather unruly. Next to him, in a stunning white dress is a young woman with brown eyes, silky looking long brown hair, and a smile filled with love directed at Harry. Poor boy. Looks like his knees are going to give out upon seeing his bride. They take their places and I watch, seeing my son become a husband. I know he'll be a great husband to this young woman. Her name...it was one of the details that stuck with me. I remember it clearly, unlike the other names in past dreams...Weasel, or something like that...Where was I? Ah, yes. The girl's name. Hermione Jane Granger was what the official stated. She seems to be rather intelligent. If I had to guess, I'd say she's a muggle-born like myself and a bookworm as well. Three generations of Potters will have fallen for bookworms if this dream is actually a vision of the future. I wonder what I'll see next?"

Harry glanced over to Hermione to see her misty eyed as she finished the page and smiled at him.

"Seems your mother's statement in the grave yard wasn't as bizarre as we thought."

Harry nodded his head and flipped to the last entry.

"October 31st , 1981. The day I have been dreading for nearly seven years is here. James assures me that we are safe. I don't like this plan at having Sirius act as bait for Tom and his cronies. Have Peter be secret Keeper. No one will suspect him. All eyes will be on Sirius. No...I don't trust Peter. He looked extremely nervous on his last visit and I have a feeling that this will be my last entry. As such, it was a wonderful dream last night. I was watching as a young boy with very messy dark brown hair and green eyes with glasses made his way up to the head's office. Lo and behold, old Professor McGonagall was sitting behind the desk, looking at the boy sternly. I learned that he had managed to tie dye all the teachers robes. And had managed to get away without any hard evidence on him. She said that she would be watching him. The boy just grinned at her. Her question, not truly directed at him was why did you not turn out like your mother? Cheeky little guy responded that he was upholding the Marauder tradition, seeing as how his dad was the son of one, godson and unofficial nephew of the other. But old McGonagall was still one step ahead of him. In the door stepped Hermione and Harry. Hermione looked upset while Harry, of course, looked proud, even

though his robes were tie dyed pink and blue. McGonagall greeted them both, Hermione as Librarian Potter and Harry as Professor Potter. Rather interesting. The dream was funny as Harry tried to congratulate his son on the prank while Hermione scolded them both. I watched them leave and heard the Headmistress pray that when Lilly Jane Potter started, she hoped she took more after Hermione than Harry. I even figured out that Harry is the Defense Against the Dark Arts Professor! Irony isn't it? Well...as much as it saddens me to know that I will not live to dream another dream, I must finish my writing and spend all the time I have left in this world and be with my beautiful baby boy and my husband, all while knowing I will not be there when he needs me. When he needs help with girls, or homework, or to be there to see his wedding or to see my grandchildren. It hurts to know all this. Why? Why must I be burdened with this? Why is life so unfair? I lost my sister because of magic and now I'll be taken away from my son because of magic. I just hope that one day, the world will fix itself because the world we live in is sad shell of it's self. To my son, who I hope is reading this. Know that your father and I love you very much and we will always be with you. Good bye, Harry James Potter. Your Mummy loves you"

Harry fought back tears as he read the last part, seeing his mother leave a message to him through the years. Sirius, watched as Hermione put an arm around Harry, comforting him. The older man left the room, making a vow to destroy the one thing that caused all this pain and misery.

-X-X-X-X-X-

The return to the school was rather uneventful. The first thing Harry did was send out the next DA meeting via the special coins Hermione had handed out at their first meeting. Harry himself was looking forward to it. Classes went smoothly, except within Umbridge's class. Harry fought the urge to hex her each and every time he saw her. It pissed him off to no end that Dumbledore had failed to do anything other than assign another teacher to watch over her, but she pretty much had full control over the school. It was with relief that February rolled around and Harry was very much looking forward to Valentines Day weekend. When class finished on Friday, Harry quickly found Hermione and asked her if she'd like to spend the day in Hogsmeade with him, to which she quickly agreed with a happy smile. The pair headed to the Great Hall for dinner

where they were once again greeted by the sight of the two youngest Weasleys, but paid them no attention as they normally did over the past year. Harry glanced up over at Hermione.

"Anywhere you want to go tomorrow?" He asked.

"Anywhere with you will be fine." She said with a smile.

Harry smiled but decided to take Hermione to the book shop in the village and then by the jewelry store to see if he could see what caught her eye. It was a good plan, he thought. He just hoped nothing would ruin it. Namely a pair of red heads that seemed hell bent on destroying their relationship, but it would do no good. Harry walked with Hermione back to the Gryffindor Tower with Hermione, looking forward to spending the day with her.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry ended up getting Hermione a very rare book that she had eyed with longing in the book shop that was a biography of each of the founders of Hogwarts and had some of their special skills listed. She hadn't even looked twice at the jewelry shop as they passed, which Harry noted that books would be one of the things he could get Hermione, though he's still try to spoil her if he ever got the chance. And he had almost decked Ron good when he thought he could get away with grabbing Hermione's bum. The broken nose she gave him was the best thing he'd seen in a long time. And the DA had been going good. At least, until April. That was when all hell broke loose. Harry was watching while Hermione created her Patronus and much to Harry's surprise, it was a doe this time, instead of what looked like an otter. He cocked an eyebrow and called his forth. The Stag burst to life and walked over to the doe and began nuzzling it. Hermione giggled while Harry shook his head in disbelief.

"Figures. Even our Patronus' can't focus when they're close to each other."

Before Hermione could retort, Dobby popped into existence, breaking their concentration as the elf looked at them with worry. Harry couldn't even speak before the elf began to.

"Harry Potter, sir..." squeaked the elf, trembling from head to foot, "Harry Potter, sir...Dobby has come to warn you...but he was ordered not to tell..."

Harry grabbed the little elf and held him in place.

"What's wrong? Just give me clues like you did in second year."

Dobby nodded and took a deep breath.

"Harry Potter... she... she..." He began, but tried to punch himself in the nose.

Harry caught his fist and saw the terror in his eyes. Harry's own narrowed.

"Let me guess. Umbridge."

The elf nodded so fast that his hats almost fell off.

"What about her Dobby?" Harry asked before he realized what had happened. "She knows, doesn't she?" He asked.

Dobby nodded again. Harry rose to his feet, keeping a grip on the struggling elf. He looked around at the dumbfounded people.

"WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?" He bellowed. "RUN!"

No one needed to be told twice. Harry let Dobby go and ordered him back to the kitchens and to lie if they asked if he warned Harry. Harry waited for the room to clear out before he grabbed Hermione by the hand and headed back out. There was a broom closet nearby. Maybe they'd be able to get there in time. It would explain the heavy breathing and the flushed looks. He was just pulling the door open to the broom closet down the hall when Harry went down from a leg binding jinx. Hermione stopped abruptly and quickly pointed her wand at Harry's legs when it went sailing out of her hand. They both looked over and saw a smirking Malfoy next to a smug looking Umbridge.

"I've got you now, Potter. Mr. Malfoy, please release the spell and return to your common room. I will be writing your father with praise for your actions as part of my squad. Oh, and fifty points to Slythrein

for the capture of Potter and Granger. Now hop along and see of you can find anymore."

Draco nodded and headed off, looking extremely smug as Umbridge grabbed them both and dragged them to the headmasters office. She gave the password and kept her grip on both of them and lead them to the headmasters office where Harry spotted several people already present. Dumbledore was sitting behind his desk, his expression serene, the tips of his long fingers together. Professor McGonagall stood rigidly beside him, her face extremely tense. Cornelius Fudge, Minister for Magic, was rocking backwards and forwards on his toes beside the fire, apparently immensely pleased with the situation; Kingsley Shacklebolt and a tough-looking wizard with very short wiry hair whom Harry did not recognize, were positioned on either side of the door like guards, and the freckled, bespectacled form of Percy Weasley hovered excitedly beside the wall, a quill and a heavy scroll of parchment in his hands, apparently poised to take notes. Harry tore his arm from Umbridge's grip, as did Hermione. Fudge looked like Christmas had come early.

*(1A)"He was heading back to Gryffindor Tower from a broom closet" said Umbridge.

There was an indecent excitement in her voice, the same callous pleasure Harry had heard as she watched Professor Trelawney dissolving with misery in the Entrance Hall.

"The Malfoy boy cornered him."

"Did he, did he?" said Fudge appreciatively. "I must remember to tell Lucius. Well, Potter... I expect you know why you are here?"

Harry fully intended to respond with a defiant 'yes': his mouth had opened and the word was half-formed when he caught sight of Dumbledore's face. Dumbledore was not looking directly at Harry - his eyes were fixed on a point just over his shoulder - but as Harry stared at him, he shook his head a fraction of an inch to each side. Harry changed direction mid-word.

"Ye—no."

"I beg your pardon?" said Fudge.

"No," said Harry, firmly.

"You don't know why you are here?"

"No, I don't," said Harry.

Fudge looked incredulously from Harry to Professor Umbridge. Harry took advantage of his momentary inattention to steal another quick look at Dumbledore, who gave the carpet the tiniest of nods and the shadow of a wink.

"So you have no idea," said Fudge, in a voice positively sagging with sarcasm, "why Professor Umbridge has brought you to this office? You are not aware that you have broken any school rules?"(1A)*

"School rules?" Harry repeated thoughtfully "No. Unless there is a rule against snogging my fiancé senseless in a broom closet is now against the rules."

Hermione turned red and looked away. Fudge blinked before he looked at Umbridge.

"You found them outside a broom closet you say? Did they look flustered and disheveled?" He asked, anger in his voice.

Umbridge blinked in confusion and gave him an uncertain look.

"Well yes...but they were in the area! And they were trying to get into the broom closet!"

Fudge looked back at Harry.

"This true?"

Harry nodded.

"Yeah. I wasn't done with her when we heard a stampede outside the door. Once we were sure we wouldn't be disturbed, we were going to go back in. Is my love life really that important to the ministry?" Harry asked, pretending to be annoyed.

Hermione looked away, fighting back a blush at the images that jumped into her head, making Fudge think that Harry was telling the

truth. Professor McGonagall looked shocked while Dumbledore was trying not to laugh at the situation. Fudge gave Umbridge a glare.

"You brought me here, assuring me that Potter would be expelled based on evidence you had! All you did was pull two hormone driven teenagers in front of me with no criminal activity! Dolores Umbridge, what game are you playing at?" He demanded.

Umbridge looked at him with indignation.

"It so happens, I have two pieces of evidence to prove that Potter was in the wrong. Here!" She said and handed him a piece of parchment that Harry recognized as being the roster for the DA.

His heart sunk. That's it. Game over. He was going to be expelled.

"Really? Are you really trying to hand me this? I don't want to see a list of female items!" Fudge yelled as he slammed the parchment on the table.

Harry looked at it and fought the urge to laugh. It was a list of personal things a girl would pick up on a regular basis. Hermione grabbed the list and quickly hid it from sight, turning beet red.

"My shopping list for the next Hogsmeade visit." She muttered.

Fudge looked outraged.

"You had better have hard evidence as to how Potter has been breaking the law, or so help me, you will be removed from your posting here at Hogwarts!"

Umbridge nodded and smirked.

"I think, Minister," said Umbridge, "we might make better progress if I fetch our informant."

"Yes, do," said Fudge.

There was a wait of several minutes, in which nobody looked at each other, then Harry heard the door open behind him. Umbridge moved past him into the room, gripping by the shoulder Cho's curly-

haired friend, Marietta, who was hiding her face in her hands. When she pulled her hands away, they saw the words SNEAK.

"Never mind the spots now, dear," said Umbridge impatiently, "just take your robes away from your mouth and tell the Minister -"

But Marietta gave another muffled wail and shook her head frantically.

"Oh, very well, you silly girl, I'll tell him," snapped Umbridge. She hitched her sickly smile back on to her face and said, "Well, Minister, Miss Edgecombe here came to my office shortly after dinner this evening and told me she had something she wanted to tell me. She said that if I proceeded to a secret room on the seventh floor, sometimes known as the Room of Requirement, I would find out something to my advantage. I questioned her a little further and she admitted that there was to be some kind of meeting there. Unfortunately, at that point this hex," she waved impatiently at Marietta's concealed face, "came into operation and upon catching sight of her face in my mirror the girl became too distressed to tell me any more."

"Well, now," said Fudge, "It is very brave of you, my dear, coming to tell Professor Umbridge. You did exactly the right thing. Now, will you tell me what happened at this meeting?"

But Marietta would not speak; she merely shook her head again, her eyes wide and fearful.

"Haven't we got a counter-jinx for this?" Fudge asked, "So she can speak freely?"

"I have not yet managed to find one," Umbridge admitted grudgingly, and Harry felt a surge of pride in Hermione's jinxing ability. "But it doesn't matter if she won't speak, I can take up the story from here. You will remember, Minister, that I sent you a report back in October that Potter had met a number of fellow students in the Hog's Head in Hogsmeade. The purpose of Potter's meeting with these students was to persuade them to join an illegal society, whose aim was to learn spells and curses the Ministry has decided are inappropriate for school-age -"

"I think you'll find you're wrong there, Dolores," said Dumbledore quietly, peering at her over the half-moon spectacles perched halfway down his crooked nose.

Harry stared at him. He could not see how Dumbledore was going to talk him out of this one. Fudge gave him a questioning look.

"I am pointing out that Dolores is quite wrong to suggest that such a group was, at that time, illegal. If you remember, the Ministry Decree banning all student societies was not put into effect until two days after Harry's Hogsmeade meeting, so he was not breaking any rules at all in the Hog's Head."

"That's all very fine, Headmaster," Umbridge said, smiling sweetly, "but we are now nearly six months on from the introduction of Educational Decree Number Twenty-four. If the first meeting was not illegal, all those that have happened since most certainly are."

"Well," said Dumbledore, "they certainly would be, if they had continued after the Decree came into effect. Do you have any evidence that any such meetings continued?"

As Dumbledore spoke, Harry heard a rustle behind him and rather thought Kingsley whispered something.

"Evidence?" repeated Umbridge, "Have you not been listening, Dumbledore? Why do you think Miss Edgecombe is here?"

"Oh, can she tell us about six months' worth of meetings?" said Dumbledore, raising his

eyebrows. "I was under the impression that she was merely reporting a meeting tonight."

"Miss Edgecombe," said Umbridge at once, "tell us how long these meetings have been going on, dear. Have they been happening regularly over the last six months? Just nod or shake your head, dear," Umbridge said coaxingly to Marietta.

Everyone in the room was gazing at the top of Marietta's face. Only her eyes were visible

between the pulled-up robes and her curly fringe. To Harry's utter amazement, Marietta shook her head.

"What do you mean by shaking your head, dear?" Umbridge asked.

"I would have thought her meaning was quite clear. There have been no secret meetings for the past six months. Is that correct, Miss Edgecombe?" McGonagall asked.

Marietta nodded.

"But there was a meeting tonight! And Potter was the leader! Potter organized it! Potter - why are you shaking your head, girl?"

"Well, usually when a person shakes their head," said McGonagall coldly, "they mean 'no'. So unless Miss Edgecombe is using a form of sign-language as yet unknown to humans -"

Professor Umbridge seized Marietta, pulled her round to face her and began shaking her very hard. A split second later Dumbledore was on his feet, his wand raised. Kingsley started forward and Umbridge leapt back from Marietta, waving her hands in the air as though they had been burned.

"I cannot allow you to manhandle my students, Dolores," said Dumbledore and, for the first time, he looked angry.

"Very well. Miss Edgecombe tipped me off and I proceeded at once to the seventh floor, accompanied by certain trustworthy students, so as to catch those in the meeting red-handed. It appears that they were forewarned of my arrival, however, the hall was clear except for Mr. Potter and Miss Granger."

Fudge shook his head and looked to Dumbledore.

"It seems that there is no evidence to support her claims that anything illegal has been done here." He started, but Harry cut him off.

"Actually, sir. There has. Professor Umbridge forced Hermione to use a blood quill during her detention several months ago.'

Fudge snapped his head to look at Harry and then to Umbridge before settling his eyes back on Harry.

"Do you have proof?" He asked.

Harry pulled Hermione's hand out of her pocket and showed Fudge, who started to turn red as he rounded on Umbridge.

"You! You will report to the Ministry at once to be brought forth for this transgression! Kingsley! Make sure she finds her way."

Shacklebolt nodded and escorted her from the office where Fudge rubbed his temples.

"I apologize Dumbledore. It seems the stress of teaching has gotten to her. I'll send someone to replace her."

Dumbledore raised his hand, smiling at Fudge.

"No need. I have a suitable replacement in mind already. You'll approve of him."

Fudge nodded and left the office followed by the rest of his entourage leaving McGonagall, Dumbledore, Harry, and Hermione. Dumbledore nodded approvingly at them.

"Very well played, you two. It was rather amusing watching the Minister turn those interesting shades of red. Now. I must contact the replacement I have in mind. You two should return to your rooms. No detours." He said with a knowing smile.

Harry and Hermione nodded and left the office. McGonagall turned to the Headmaster.

"Did they really start an illegal organization?" She asked,

Dumbledore merely smiled.

"I cannot confirm or deny it Minnie. Hypothetically, if they did, I would approve it, making it perfectly legal. Of course, that is if it existed."

The old transfiguration teacher smiled and nodded.

"Of course."

-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry and his year mates entered the DA classroom and pulled out their books and waited patiently for their instructor. After several minutes, an old man entered the room who bared a striking resemblance to Dumbledore. He stopped at the front of the classroom and gave them a hard look.

"Alright. To being with, my name is Aberforth Dumbledore. And yes, I am related to the old goat that runs this place. I taught here for a few years back in the day and left it for a quieter life. While I'm here, you'll be learning how to counter the Dark Arts and how to duel. Not the way that pansy Lockhart taught in that flop of a club, but the proper way. And I suggest you enjoy your reaming years here, cause after this, your fucked." He stated bluntly.

The class blinked in surprise before Hermione raised her hand.

"What do you mean, sir?"

He narrowed his eyes at her.

"Granger. Huh. Alright. I'll answer it. I mean that the world outside these walls is hopeless. People want you to believe that it's a great opportunity out there. Bollocks. All that is out there is misery and stupidity. The world isn't forgiving. You make a mistake and it slams all it's weight on you! BAM! Your nothing and your just trying to survive. Here, everything is given to you. All you need. And if you make a mistake, you pick yourself up and go about your business. That's why your fucked outside these halls."

Harry couldn't believe how cynical the man was but push it aside as Professor Dumbledore started their lecture on proper counters. It was going to be an...interesting year.

-X-X-X-X-X-

The months passed smoothly for them as their OWLs approached. They seemed to be in the clear until the morning of his History of Magic test. He was half way through before he felt out of his chair

and clutched his head. The Procter rushed over and sent him to the nurse. Instead, he headed for the Headmaster's office and gave the password. To say Dumbledore was surprised, was an understatement.

"Harry. To what do I owe this unexpected pleasure?"

"He has Sirius. He has him in the prophecy room."

Dumbledore didn't pause as he moved to his fire and made a fire call to Grimmauld Place. After a few minutes, he withdrew his head and looked disturbed as he sat back in his chair.

"This is not good. It seems Sirius left this morning. Kreacher heard him say he was going to destroy what has caused so much pain for you."

Harry leapt to his feet.

"What are we waiting for? Let's go get him!"

Dumbledore shook his head.

"I will round up the order and head there myself. You will gather your fighters and stand by in case we need help. I only pray we do not." He ordered.

Harry was about to argue when Dumbledore cut him off.

"While you may be strong enough to face Voldemort and fight him to a stand still, you would not be able to handle his Death Eaters as well. Please Harry. You will be our reinforcements incase we need them. After all, Aberforth has told me of you and your fighters prowess in combat."

Harry gave a stiff nod and left the office, looking for Hermione.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Hermione was currently in the Gryffindor common room, smiling while she hugged her midsection. She'd returned from the Hospital wing after going to see about her sickness in the morning. It started up a week ago and seemed to stay around. She was surprised to

find out she was pregnant. Two months to be exact. She figured they had conceived back in April, the night after the incident with the Ministry and Fudge. She smiled as she recalled that night. The shared that night in the Room of Requirements. She looked back at her stomach, smiling. She was going to be a mother and Harry was the father. She frowned as she realized two things. One, she had to tell Harry. Two, she had to tell her parents. Oh, this was going to be an interesting summer, that much was sure. A sudden warmth in her pocket snapped her from her musings. She pulled out the bewitched Galleon and saw the current date on the coin and the request to see the members in fifteen minutes. She put her coin away and hurried to the Room of Requirements. She wondered what was going on.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry waited for everyone to arrive and was pleased to see that everyone that could, did arrive. Only two were missing, Cho and her friend. Harry could care less as he stepped in front of them.

"Thanks for coming so quickly. Recent events have occurred and we have the possibility to be called upon to aid the Order of the Phoenix."

"Dumbledore's group? Why would he want us to aid them? We're just kids!" Ernie stated.

Harry nodded.

"That is the case, but Dumbledore believes it is our generations turn to step up to the plate and face the darkness. He trusts us and believes in us. If any of you do not wish to come when we are called, you can leave and we will think no differently of you."

He waited for several minutes and continued when he saw no one leave.

"Very well. Here is the situation. Voldemort has infiltrated the ministry and is hunting for something. He has my Godfather as a hostage and is trying to use him to get the item. Currently, Dumbledore and the Order are on their way now to try to stop them."

"Who's your Godfather?" Colin asked.

"My Godfather is Sirius Black, a man falsely accused of a crime and sentenced with out a trial."

"BLACK? Your pulling my leg!" Someone yelled.

"It's true. He was framed and has been in hiding with Dumbledore's help. But that isn't why we are here. We are here to prepare to support the Order. You all remember you roles, right?"

They nodded.

"Very well. Squad Leaders, please come up here."

Harry watched as Cedric and Luna stepped forward. Luna was the Ravenclaw leader because Cho had not shown up and she was the next strongest in her house.

"Alright. Feel free to pass this to the individual team leaders, but here is the basic plan. Ravens, you'll hold here and secure the castle. McGonagall will be remaining behind so, get in touch with her. Puffs. You're our reserve. I'll be leading a few Gryffindors with me to support the order."

"How many are you taking?" Cedric asked.

Harry paused.

"Myself, the twins, Hermione, and Neville." He responded.

Cedric shook his head.

"I suggest that Luna and I come with you. I can pass on command to Ernie and I'm sure Luna can find someone to be in command till she gets back."

Harry was about to argue, but Hermione stopped him.

"He's right. We can use both of them."

Harry paused as he saw a feather appear in a flash of fire. It was one of Fawkes and it was the signal he had been waiting for from Dumbledore. He looked back at Hermione who nodded. Seven fireplaces popped into exsistance along one of the walls.

"Fine. I'll leave Seamus in charge till I return. Get yourselves ready. We're going in hot."

This is going to be a two part update. Originally, this chapter and the next were part of the same one, but I felt it looked rushed if I kept it as one. I liked this chapter, because it shows Dumbledore is ready to let Harry take ahold of his destiny and to allow the next Generation to face off with the evil that lives in the world. I hope you enjoyed it.

Chapter VIX

You Can't Take Me

The Atrium was silent as night settled on London. At least, until several fire places roared to life. Harry and his team came out of the fires, wands raised and searching for targets. He looked at them and nodded.

"Dumbledore and his team are pinned down inside the Death Chamber. Death Eaters outnumber them, but they're holding their position. Fred. George. You two are our heavy hitters. Use your teamwork to the best you can. Cedric. You'll be our sniper. You have the best aim. Luna. Hermione. Neville. You'll be with me on the ground level since you three are some of the best duelists we have. Everyone ready?"

They nodded their heads, nervously.

"Let's go!" He hurried toward the chamber that Dumbledore gave him directions to.

He also knew that the rest of his squad would be inside the ministry in twenty minutes as support, followed by the Hufflepuffs. The Ravenclaws would be the defenders of the castle along with the order members present. The DA members hurried on, using the directions and they eventually could hear the sounds of combat. Harry and his team stacked up along the left side of the door, with Harry on point. He held up his fist before gesturing forward and hurried into the room, staying low. He had his team get into position before he rose to his full height and took aim.

"STUPEFY!" He roared.

Seven stunners ripped through the air, smacking into the Death Eaters. The combatants looked up to see seven people in the upper levels. Harry ducked as a purple jet soared past his head in part of the retaliation. He could hear Cedric sending curses after curses down at the Death Eaters as Fred and George were doing some incredible spells, with one always attacking and the other twin defending.

"Luna, Hermione, Neville! On me!" Harry called and moved forward, firing a severing charm at Bellatrix, making her dodge and miss Sirius with the killing curse.

Said Black dodged and looked up to see Harry jump over the last wall and start to duel with Lucius Malfoy with surprising skill. Sirius looked around and saw the Longbottom boy taking on his parents torturer, ironically, with a ferocity he hadn't seen before while Hermione and Luna were dealing with two Death Eaters. He saw Aberforth, a blur of movement and spells. Black tried to move forward to help them, but his crazy Cousin blocked his attempts with another killing curse that he barely managed to dodge. Harry looked over and saw Neville locked in a full body bind. He looked back at Malfoy who was smirking.

"You fight well, Potter. But it ends here! Avda-"

"Defodio!" Harry's spell caught Malfoy in the wand arm.

They watched as his hand was removed from his forearm before a stunner curtsey of Cedric knocked the man out. Harry moved over to Neville and removed the body bind and the pair split off. Neville moved to help Luna and Hermione while Harry stepped over to help Sirius. Bellatrix decided that the odds were not in her favor and sent a spell at Sirius' head and ran. Harry moved after her, as did Hermione before anyone could stop them. Sirius moved to help them, but was blocked by a grinning Death Eater who seemed intent on killing him. He could only hope that they would be alright.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry and Hermione skid around the corner and both ducked, however, Hermione, wasn't quick enough and caught the torture curse. She screamed in pain as she went down, dropping her wand. Harry quickly fired a stunner that broke the evil bitch's concentration. He glanced over at Hermione, seeing her holding her stomach in agony. He moved her behind the pillar and leapt forward, firing off curses at her, trying to keep her off balance. He finally managed to connect with a severing charm into her leg, causing her to fall and her wand to clatter away. He stepped forward and pointed it at her.

"This ends now, Bellatrix." He said through gritted teeth as his scar began to throb in pain.

"I think not, Harry." A cold voice sounded from behind him.

He spun around and saw Voldemort walking toward him, wand in hand.

"Tom. To what do I owe this pleasure?" Harry asked, using his metal shields to block the pain out.

Voldemort cocked an eyebrow.

"So you know of my true name? Impressive. To answer your question, I am here for the prophecy. You see...I only know part of it. And if I know the whole thing, then I can destroy the threat to my existence."

He and Voldemort began to circle each other, maintaining eye contact.

"Ah...yes. The words of a fraud that you followed with such devotion. I thought you were smarter than this, Tom."

Voldemort gave him a menacing look.

"Do not try to mock me, young Harry. I have killed more braver wizards than you."

Harry smirked.

"They say stupidity and bravery are the same side of the coin."

Voldemort gave him a curious look.

"You are different tonight, Harry. You seem to accept your fate to die."

Harry shook his head.

"No. I merely understand that fear does no good when facing your opponents. You've got to grow some balls and face it head on. Professor Dumbledore taught me that." Harry said with a smile.

Riddle raised an eyebrow.

"Albus Dumbledore taught you that? Rather blunt from him."

Harry smiled before he sprang into action.

"Defodio!"

"Deprimo!"

Harry felt himself thrown back from Voldemort by a blast of wind while the evil wizard used his wand to create a solid brick wall that was shattered by the force of the spell. Both recovered and continued their fight.

"Expulsio!" Harry called out, hitting the floor in front of Voldemort.

The dark wizard was thrown back from the explosion and landed heavily on his feet and pointed his wand at the raven haired wizard. Voldemort used a slashing motion and a wave of purple fire hurled at him. Harry reacted quickly.

"Protego Horribilis!"

The flames slammed against the shield, but failed to reach Harry. Voldemort paused and gave Harry a curt nod.

"You fight well Potter. I haven't had a duel like this in years. Dumbledore has trained you well."

Harry grudgingly nodded his acceptance of the complement and aimed his wand at Voldemort.

"Stupefy!"

"Protego!"

Harry's stunner rebounded and slammed into the statue behind him. Harry saw a flash of emerald fire and didn't look back as he leapt to the side as Voldemort fired a killing curse. Harry barely dodged and heard a gasp. Dolores Jane Umbridge took the killing curse meant for Harry. While he wasn't a fan of the woman, even she didn't deserve to die like that. Stepped on by Hagrid's half brother Grawp maybe. But not by killing curse. Not worth the magic required to

generate the curse. Harry looked back up and prepared his next spell, but Voldemort beat him to it.

"Crucio!"

Harry felt the spell hit him and pain shot through his body. After a moment, the pain ceased and Harry gasped for air. He shakily rose to his feet to see a sneering Voldemort.

"Come now Harry. Surely you can do better than this?" He asked.

"At least I don't rely on unforgivable, you weak, cowardly bastard." Harry spat as he tried to rise to his feet.

Voldemort screamed in anger as he hit Harry with another torture curse.

Harry dropped to the ground again, as pain shot through his body. Riddle bared down on him, snarling.

"You dare call me a coward! Filthy Half bred! You and your mud blood mother both!"

Harry fought the urge to scream as the pain increased. Riddle seemed to enjoy hurting him.

"Yes. Yes. I know all about you, Harry. Don't worry. I'll deal with your mud blood whore over behind that pillar after I deal with you. Maybe I'll make you do it yourself. The imperious curse can do wonders." He said with a smirk.

With a roar of anger, Harry sprung up, ignoring the pain and brought his fist into contact with Riddle's jaw. The man stumbled back, but Harry moved quickly, throwing another punch, catching him in the nose, shattering it. Harry brought his fist up again, but he felt himself thrown back and away from Voldemort. The Dark Lord held his jaw and glanced over to see the Minister looking at him in shock several Aurors trained their wands on him. Voldemort looked over his shoulder and saw Dumbledore walking calmly around the corner, wand raised.

"It was foolish of you to come here to night, Tom."

Voldemort sneered.

"I will finish this other time, oldman. Make the boy strong so that I may enjoy ending his life."

With a swish of his cloak, Voldemort vanished, taking Bellatrix with him. Harry staggered to his feet and gripped his wand tightly as he looked around for Voldemort. Dumbledore walked over and placed a hand on Harry's shoulder. The boy looked at him with a frown.

"Took your sweet time, did you?" Harry asked.

Dumbledore smiled.

"I apologize. A few of the Death Eaters wanted to discuss some of the finer details of blood purity with me. They currently are inside the prophecy room, tied together and unconscious."

"How many?"

"Not too many. Only a dozen of their best fighters. Nothing I couldn't handle."

Harry nodded and headed over to check on Hermione. She slowly came around and winced in pain.

"I need to see Madam Pomfrey. Quickly." She muttered, holding her stomach.

Harry nodded and helped her over to the Fireplace where he stood beside Hermione.

"Hogwarts Infirmary!" He spoke as he threw the Floo powder at their feet.

The last thing he saw was Dumbledore giving him a small smile. Harry and Hermione stepped out of the fireplace in Madam Pomfrey's office where the woman gave them a shocked look before it turned stern.

"Miss Granger! You of all people should know that Floo travel is frowned upon in your condition!"

Harry looked at her confused.

"What condition?"

Hermione shook her head.

"I'll tell you soon Harry." She said before she looked back at the Healer. "Can you check and see if it is okay, please?" She said in a worried voice.

She nodded and lead them to a bed where Hermione sat down, holding Harry's hand. Madam Pomfrey ran her scan before she gave Hermione a sad look.

"I'm sorry Hermione. But the Cruciatus Curse did too much damage to the cells in the placenta to support the child. I'm sorry." She said as she left the room.

Hermione felt her world shatter as tears began to run down her face. Harry squeezed her hand gently. He too, felt his heart break at the news and his own tears began to fall as well. To suddenly find out that you were going to have a child and lose it in the same moment wasn't something anyone should ever experience.

"Hermione. It's going to be alright. It's not your fault." He said softly as he pulled her into a hug.

Hermione began to sob as she hugged him tightly.

"I shouldn't have gone. I should have told you and stayed behind. You had the right to know." She sobbed.

Harry held her tightly as she cried in pain and loss.

"I probably would have had you stay behind if I had known, but I do not blame you, love. The only ones I blame is Bellatrix and Voldemort. I promise you, I will make this right."

Hermione held onto him tightly, still crying.

"I know. But it still hurts Harry. I was looking forward to being a mother when I found out. I was excited." She sobbed..

Harry kept her in his embrace, stroking her hair as she cried.

"I wanted to hold our baby when it was born. To watch it grow up and to be there for it. Now...it will never live. Never know the world. Never fall in love." She began to sob harder as Harry just held her, both of them in too much pain to care about the world around them.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Dumbledore returned to the school and received the news about Harry and Hermione. He sat at his desk feeling all his 114 years. Another tragedy had struck Harry. The loss of his unborn child would be hard for him to overcome, and Miss Granger would be hurt for a very long time. To say Albus didn't envy Bellatrix LeStrange is an understatement. Harry was liable to kill her next time they crossed paths, and Albus would not interfere at that meeting. He looked out over the school grounds and sighed as he leaned against the railing. Harry was powerful, he had shown his skills in fighting Malfoy along with dueling Tom, but he was at a disadvantage because of the Unforgivables, namely the Cruciatus and the Killing curse. If Dumbledore could get Harry's mental shields strong enough, he'd be able to block out the effects of the curse. He knew it was possible because he'd done it when he fought Grindlewald all those years ago. The old man sighed and rubbed his temples as he made his way to the desk. There was some good news and that was that Peter Pettigrew had been caught. Miss Lovegood managed to catch him with a stunner as he tried to run. He figured that Sirius would be declared a free man by the end of the month once they interrogated Pettigrew. As is, he had to find a way to bring Horace Slughorn back to Hogwarts. After thinking on it for a few minutes, he summoned Snape to his office. Snape would be moved to more important tasks. He just hoped that things panned out the way he hoped.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry hardly left Hermione's side for the next several weeks. When Jack and Miranda had picked the pair up, they had seen the change in their demeanor. Jack had been planning for weeks to find out what happened, and thankfully, the time came. He was sitting up, nursing a coke when he saw Harry entered the room and nod at him. Jack returned the silent greeting and watched as Harry pulled a coke out himself and sat down at the table. To Jack, he looked older. It was like he'd seen and gone through things no one his age should have.

Jack had seen eyes like that after his time in the Royal Marines. Afghanistan was a terrible time. He'd seen good men lose it from the stress, and it all started with the same haunted look that Harry had.

"Harry. What's wrong?" He asked.

Harry sighed and looked up at the man and Jack could see the fatigue in his eyes, like he was almost ready to crack if he didn't tell some one.

"Did Hermione tell you what happened at the Ministry?"

Jack shook his head as Harry sighed and ran a hand through his hair.

"Well...I guess it's time to tell you. A few weeks ago, my Godfather decided to destroy a prophecy containing information about me and Voldemort. He ended up captured and tortured by said wizard. I immediately told Professor Dumbledore and he mobilized the Order of the Phoenix, his own fighters while I gathered the Defenders of Light, my own fighter force who Hermione and I were training. The Order launched an assault on the Ministry but they underestimated the strength of the Death Eaters. I lead six of my best as reinforcements while I had one squad ready to follow in after thirty minutes. We managed to defeat most of the Death Eaters except one." Harry paused and swallowed a sip of coke before continuing. "I gave chase after she tried to kill my Godfather. She tried to get me with a torture curse, but missed and got Hermione, who followed me. I moved her to safety and managed to wound the Death Eater. But then Voldemort showed up. We talked a bit and dueled to a standstill as he decided to torture me. When he threatened to kill Hermione...or worse, make me do it under the Imperious Curse. In my rage, I forgot that I can throw off the Imperious curse. But I didn't care as I punched him. I went after him again and managed to land two solid hits before his Death Eater knocked me away from him, and he escaped."

Jack listened and nodded his head in understanding.

"What did your casualties look like?" Jack asked.

"Two wounded in my group. The Order only had one severely wounded member. No deaths."

"What about the Death Eaters?"

"No dead, but a few of them had missing limbs. A couple will be vegetables for a long time."

Jack let this sink in and had to admit that these two groups were lucky they got away with injuries. But he could tell that Harry still had more to say and he waited. Harry took another sip, looking a little better now that he had told someone.

"But the worst part came next. I rushed Hermione to the infirmary at her request. I found out...she was pregnant, but the torture curse caused her to have a miscarriage. She doesn't seem to be getting better, and I don't know what to do."

Jack watched him as Harry tried his best to contain his tears, barely succeeding. The older man sighed.

"The only thing you can do Harry, is just be there for her. Comfort her as best you can. You see...women develop a much deeper bond with the baby than we do in the beginning. We'll never know what it's like to carry a child inside. To feel it grow and know it depends on us to keep it alive. They have a life inside them and the bond is basically as deep as it can go. To lose it...We males will never know what's that is like. But we feel the pain of losing the child too, just not to the level that the woman will. Don't get me wrong," He said as he saw Harry's expression of disbelief, "We hurt because we think of all that we'll never get to do with the baby. But the woman is tied to it in a way we never can nor will be. And they feel that they are responsible for the loss, no matter what they are told. It's just how it is. You just have to be understanding and supportive of her. I'll speak with Miranda tomorrow and have her speak to Hermione as well."

Harry nodded his head in thanks to the man and they sat in silence for several minutes before Jack spoke again.

"Don't worry Harry. You'll both get through this and this will only deepen your bond with each other. Also, when she becomes pregnant again, I suggest monthly check ups. Mainly because she'll be more susceptible to miscarriages down the line."

Harry nodded and finished off his coke and tossing the bottle into the trash before heading to the door. He pause and looked back at Jack.

"Thanks for the advice, Jack. You have no idea how much it helped."

Jack smiled.

"Anytime Harry. Anytime."

-X-X-X-X-X-

Hermione looked at her mother, with tears in her eyes as she explained what was wrong. Miranda hugged her daughter tightly.

"Sweetie. I know how you feel. I've been through it too. I know how much you hurt. But you can't dwell on it." She said as she pulled away. "You still have Harry and you still have plenty of time to start a family. The only question I have is how? Do you want to give birth while still in school?" She asked.

Hermione shook her head.

"No mum. We didn't plan it. Even magical birth control isn't infallible."

Miranda nodded her head in understanding.

"Well...that does explain things." She said as she hugged her daughter again. "Trust me Hermione. Everything will work out. I promise you." She kissed the top of Hermione's head and held her daughter for a few moments before the door opened.

Both woman looked over and saw Harry in the doorway. He looked at Hermione with worry and love. Miranda let go of Hermione and rose from her seat and left the room. As she passed by Harry and gave him a slight squeeze of his shoulder as she left. She came across Jack in the kitchen as both of them recounted the information they had learned from the two teens. They hoped that Harry and Hermione would find peace and happiness and soon.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry sat with Hermione and had his arm around her as she stared at the floor. It was quiet for several moments before she spoke up.

"Sorry for being stubborn, Harry. I followed you into a dangerous situation without thinking about anything except the fact that you were going into danger. I didn't want to let you go without me." She told him softly.

Harry held her free hand in his and gently ran his thumb over the back of her hand.

"It's okay. We'll just be more careful in the future. I know we're both still hurting from this, but we have to move on. It's going to be hard, but we can do it. We can recover from this. Come on. Let's go read a book or something along those lines."

Hermione gave a weak chuckle as she looked at him with a sad smile.

"Your lame...but I love you."

Harry smiled softly.

"Love you too. Now let's get some rest. Otherwise, we'll be no use to anyone tomorrow."

-X-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry followed Dumbledore to the house he was looking for. Harry really just wanted to get this over with so he could get back to Hermione. She'd gotten better in the last couple of weeks, but still had her moments where she got really depressed. Harry knew it would still take sometime for her to recover. He made a mental note to make sure Bellatrix suffered greatly for the pain she had caused. Maybe he'd let Neville use the torture curse on her. He was broken from his musings by Dumbledore coming to a sudden stop, a look of worry on his face.

"Oh dear. Oh dear, dear, dear."

Harry followed his gaze up the carefully tended front path and felt his heart sink. The front door was hanging off its hinges.

Dumbledore glanced up and down the street. It seemed quite deserted.

"Wand out and follow me, Harry," he said quietly.

He opened the gate and walked swiftly and silently up the garden path, Harry at his heels, then pushed the front door very slowly, his wand raised and at the ready.

"Lumos." Dumbledore's wand tip ignited, casting its light up a narrow hallway.

To the left, another door stood open. Holding his illuminated wand aloft, Dumbledore walked into the sitting room with Harry right behind him. A scene of total devastation met their eyes. A grandfather clock lay splintered at their feet, its face cracked, its pendulum lying a little farther away like a dropped sword. A piano was on its side, its keys strewn across the floor. The wreckage of a fallen chandelier flittered nearby. Cushions lay deflated, feathers oozing from slashes in their sides; fragments of glass and china lay like powder over everything. Dumbledore raised his wand even higher, so that its light was thrown upon the walls, where something darkly red and glutinous was spattered over the wallpaper. Harry's small intake of breath made Dumbledore look around.

"Not pretty, is it?" he said heavily. "Yes, something horrible has happened here."

Dumbledore moved carefully into the middle of the room, scrutinizing the wreckage at his feet. Harry followed, gazing around, half-scared of what he might see hidden behind the wreck of the piano or the overturned sofa, but there was no sign of a body.

"Maybe there was a fight and...they dragged him off, Professor?" Harry suggested, trying not to imagine how badly wounded a man would have to be to leave those stains spattered halfway up the walls.

"I don't think so," said Dumbledore quietly, peering behind an overstuffed armchair lying on its side.

"You mean he's —?"

"Still here somewhere? Yes."

And without warning, Dumbledore swooped, plunging the tip of his wand into the seat of the overstuffed armchair, which yelled, "Ouch!"

"Good evening, Horace,"

-X-X-X-X-X-

Voldemort frowned as he looked into the fire. He had been simply trying to figure out how Potter could have had such a drastic improvement in only a year. He had been fought to a stand still, even used a couple Unforgivables on him, and yet he still kept coming for more. And it confused him. Voldemort looked deep into the fire, pulling up the details of the duel with Potter. It was rather impressive that the boy had known such high level spells, but he did admit that Dumbledore was training him, so perhaps it shouldn't be that surprising. But this proved that the boy was indeed powerful. And if his development continued, he would soon rival even Dumbledore in his prime. At that truly frightened Voldemort. For Dumbledore was the only one who had even a chance to kill him until this boy came around. Now, he had two people who had the power to defeat him. He didn't know what he could do, but he still had a plan to follow through. It made him smile as he thought of how well this could work to his advantage.

"Bring me Draco Malfoy. It's time for him to earn his right to join us."

-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry spent his time with Hermione, both of them practicing their skills in the mind arts. Hermione seemed like her old self, but Harry could still see a difference. Her smiles weren't as bright as they used to be. Her laugh didn't sound as musical, and her eyes didn't sparkle like they used to. No. What he saw as someone like him. Someone who had dealt with more than they should have and been dealt a shitty hand. But the two of them were just too stubborn to let it keep them down. It was during July that Harry and Hermione received their OWLs. Harry blinked at Hermione in confusion.

"Why won't you open them?" He asked her.

She looked at him in worry.'

"Because I know I've failed everything!"

Harry shook his head, smirking.

"If you failed everything, I'll eat my firebolt."

She paused and giggled at the picture in her head of Harry eating the broom like it was a steak. She picked up her letter and sighed.

"Fine. Let's see how bad I did." She muttered as she tore the letter open and read through the contents.

He watched her expression as it changed from worried to neutral. She was silent for almost a whole minute.

"Hermione?" said Harry tentatively, for Hermione still hadn't spoken. "How did you do?"

"I...Not bad," said Hermione in a small voice.

Harry plucked the paper from her hands and smirked.

"You got a grand total of eleven OWLs. That is brilliant in all honesty, Hermione."

She smiled timidly at him.

"What about you? How'd you do?" She asked.

Harry looked down at his and counted them.

"Hmm...Seven owls, looks like. Failed Divination and History of Magic." He told her.

Hermione gave him a slight smirk.

"I hope our children will inherit my brains." She stated.

Harry smiled. It had been the first time in almost two months since she brought up anything to do with children. Seems she was indeed getting better.

"I hope not. I don't need a second lovely lady outsmarting me at every turn."

Hermione giggled.

"Come off it. She'd have you wrapped around her little finger and you know it."

Harry raised an eyebrow.

"Are you saying I'm a push over?"

"Only with the women in your life." She stated calmly, sipping her tea.

Harry grumbled and Hermione giggled at his antics. It felt good to be able to joke with her again.

-X-X-X-X-X-

And like most good things, summer ended too quickly for Harry's taste. It felt like no time at all before they were boarding the train to go back to Hogwarts. But at least the Weasleys, well...Ron and Ginny, really...stayed away from them. Fred and George had decided to leave Hogwarts and start a Joke shop that Harry was happy to say was a perfect idea. He walked past the compartments, nodding to several DA members as he passed and managed to catch a glance at Luna and Neville in a deep discussion, of what, he really didn't want to know. He was almost back when trouble hit. Namely a certain Weasley was determined to sit in the same compartment as him. He came up to the door and paused when he heard voices.

"Leave, Granger."

He recognized the voice as that of Ginny Weasley.

"Excuse me? I think you should leave seeing as I was already here."

"This is Harry's compartment. He wants to be with me. You just using some kind of magic to keep him with you. I'm sure he'll thank me for freeing him."

Harry didn't know whether to laugh or cry at Ginny's stupidity. He decided to listen some more and hear what was going on. After all, Hermione could handle herself.

"Really? You think I've been bewitching him into being with me?"

He could hear the disbelief in Hermione's voice.

"Of course. Why else would he be with a flat chested book worm like you? Your plain, boring, and ugly." Ginny stated as if it was true.

"Ginny. You have five seconds to leave here before I make you leave."

Harry knew that tone. It was Hermione's You'll-listen-to-me-if-you-know-what's-good-for-you tone. It was one that he didn't like to hear so he decided to step in. He saw Ginny's eyes light up as she threw herself at him.'

"Harry! It's been too long!"

He pushed her away with disgust as she gave him a confused look.

"Leave, tart."

She blinked in confusion.

"E-excuse me?"

His eyes narrowed.

"You heard me. I said leave you tart. If anyone is guilty of trying to bewitch me, it's you and your attempts to use love potions on me. Now leave or I'll let Hermione deal with you."

Ginny began to pout, trying to appeal to Harry.

"But Harry. You know you love me. You're supposed to love me. Not that little whore."

Wrong thing to say. Harry turned back to her, anger radiating off of him.

"GET OUT. No one talks about Hermione like that! I'm through giving you warnings. You have to the count of five to get your ass out of here, you little tramp."

Ginny looked like she'd been slapped.

"B-but-"

"One."

"Harry. Please. Let me-"

"Two."

Ginny glared at him.

"Stop being like this. Ple-"

"Three."

"FINE!" She screamed and stormed out of the compartment.

Harry watched her go before he pulled his wand out of his pocket and sighed. He dropped down next to Hermione and pulled her close.

"I came way too close to hexing her." He said as he leaned his head back in his seat.

Hermione snuggled up next to him, feeling his heartbeat return to normal.

"This year isn't going to be easy, is it?" She asked softly.

Harry paused, unsure of how to answer.

"I don't think it will be. But no mater what, I'll always be with you, Hermione. No mater what."

She looked up at him with a dazzling smile.

"And I will always be there for you, Harry. No mater the odds or the obstacle, I'll be right by your side to the end."

The Hogwarts express continued on to another year at Hogwarts. Harry could only hope that this year would be a normal one. But fate has other plans.

I know some of you hate me for what I did to Harry and Hermione, but I already had this planned in the beginning. I needed for Harry to have some reason to want revenge on Bellatrix since she didn't kill Sirius and the man lived. And as for the speech Harry got about women and miscarriages, it's the same one my mom gave me after my fiance miscarried our baby. I know how Harry feels in this chapter because it was how I felt when I got the both peices of news in the same day. Therefore, this chapter had a personal attachment for me. I even cried remembering how it felt, but enough of that. It's been over a year and I don't need you guys feeling sorry for me. I just hope you did enjoy the chapter And yes Sirius has been cleared of all charges and will be appearing later on.

Chapter X

Go The Distance

Harry and Hermione entered the Great Hall with the rest of the school and awaited for the sorting ceremony to commence. The sixth year Prefects that they were didn't allow them to sit where they wanted to, but being near the head of the table wasn't a bad thing. Harry looked over the table and was pleasantly surprise to see that Snape was not among the teachers, but he rationalized that he was simply busy or something. He also saw Professor Aberforth Dumbledore looking out amongst the students, looking rather bored, or irritated. It was hard to tell. The man reminded him too much of a muggle comedian who also seemed to be cynical to the core. He also spotted the man named Slughorn at the teachers table and it confused Harry. Hermione also noticed the teachers setup as well and frowned.

"Wait. If Professor Dumbledore is still here for Defense Against the Dark Arts, what's Slughorn here for? And where's Snape?" She asked him in a hushed whisper.

Harry shrugged and looked at the table hopefully.

"Maybe my prayers have been answered and that greasy git got sacked."

Hermione giggled and swatted his arm.

"Harry. Play nice."

"I did. For five years. Since he's not here, I won. Now let's hear what our headmaster has to say."

Sure enough, the old man rose to his feet and gave the Great Hall a bright smile.

"Welcome! Welcome to another year here at Hogwarts! Before we begin with our customary feast, there are things that need to be done. Namely, the Sorting! Now, I know that you will make these new, eager young ones feel right at home as they too, prepare to learn all that is learnable here at our beloved school. Now, without further ado, I present the Hogwarts Sorting hat, who has been

nicknamed Hatty by a certain young second year" His bright blue eyes seemed to twinkle in amusement as a small girl at the Ravenclaw table reddened slightly.

Harry looked up and saw the Hat scowl at Dumbledore.

"Maybe I should have sorted you into Hufflepuff, feather brain." It stated bluntly.

Several of the students looked at the hat in shock while Harry and the rest of the Gryffindors tried not to laugh. Aberforth smirked at Dumbledore.

"I like this hat."

Dumbledore gave his brother a small smile.

"Come now. Enough teasing the Headmaster. We have much to do, Hatty."

"Yes, Headmaster Feather Brain."

It was too much for the Gryffindors and they lost it, laughing while the rest of the school tried to figure out what had just happened. After several minutes, they were able control themselves. Dumbledore turned the floor over to the hat who glared at the Gryffindors.

"Laugh while you can, oh brave house of Gryffindor. I still have reservations about certain members placement, right Mister Potter?"

Harry cocked an eyebrow at the hat before he responded.

"Careful what you say, Hatty. Otherwise, you'll lose that mouth of yours."

The hat simply stared at him and shuddered.

"A threat worthy of a Slythrein. Somehow, I believe you could do that. Anyway, let's get this show on the road."

It cleared its throat, well, would have if it had one, and began its song. It seemed that it just reused the one from the previous year,

but they still applauded it none the less and the sorting commenced. After the last first year sat down, Dumbledore moved back to his spot and smiled.

"Well. That was very enlightening. Now, on with the rest of the speech. Professor Dumbledore has agreed to stay on and remain the Defense Against the Dark Arts Professor."

There was a round of applause and most were surprised that a DADA teacher had stayed on another year.

"Not really true. He showed up halfway through last term" Harry muttered, but he was happy they had a competent teacher.

"Also, I must inform you that unfortunately, Professor Snape will not be returning this year due to personal issues."

The Slytherins booed at this news while the rest of the school erupted into cheers and happy shouts at the news. Dumbledore smiled at the display and waited while the school calmed down.

"In his place, Professor Horace Slughorn has agreed to return to Hogwarts to take up his old post as Potions Master and Head of Slythrein House."

The man gave a kind smile and a wave as the house gave him a round of polite applause. Dumbledore used a hand to silence them before he spoke.

"Well...it is at this point where I must urge you to be on your guard this year. Many of you have no doubt heard that the Dark Lord has indeed returned. But rest assured, while you are here inside these walls, he can not touch you, or harm you. The only thing you need to worry about, is your school work. Owls for you fifth years and NEWTs for you seventh years. Even though darkness is returning, it won't stop your exams. That is a different kind of evil. Now, I believe it is time for our feast. Tuck in!"

All around the hall, food appeared on the tables and the students dug in. Harry glanced down the table and saw Ron tackling a small chicken and it made him slightly sick. Meanwhile, Ginny seemed to be throwing glares at Hermione that the brunette ignored. Harry turned away from the youngest Weasleys and simply enjoyed his

meal. After finishing up, the Headmaster dismissed them. Harry rose and cleared his throat.

"First years, if you'll follow me, we'll head up the Gryffindor tower."

Seeing the crowd of tired looking eleven year olds, Harry had to wonder if he looked like this when he first arrived. He was brought out of his musings by Hermione poking his arm. He gave her an embarrassed smile and beckoned the first years to follow. It was a decent trip until they came across Peeves, who was lazily floating by. He glanced over at Harry and he gave him a brief wave.

"Hey, there, wee Potty."

"Hello Peeves. Been up to mischief?"

The poltergeist grinned.

"You know it, Potter. I just have to find away to really screw with ol' Filch."

Harry grinned at him.

"I'm a Prefect, so I can't suggest you use superglue to glue his cleaning supplies to the shelves their on."

Peeves face broke into a wide grin.

"Spoken like a true Marauder. Maybe there's hope for you yet."

"Remember, I didn't suggest anything."

"Of course, spawn of Prongs. Have a nice evening."

"You too Peeves."

The first years watched as Peeves zoomed away while Hermione shook her head and both of them lead their charges up to the tower. Harry and Hermione gave them the overview of the tower and sent them to bed. They stayed in the common room for a few moments before they parted with a kiss and headed off to bed.

-x-x-x-x-x-

Harry happily walked into the potions room after he had heard he'd be able to continue the course, even though he got an E in the course. Professor Slughorn seemed absolutely thrilled that Harry would be in his class and had a wide grin on his face throughout the lesson. Harry, with the help of an old potions book succeeded in making the best Draught of living Death in the whole class. Hermione had asked him, or rather demanded to know how he did it.

"Here. Take a look." He told her as he handed her the potions book.

Hermione skimmed through it and looked at the pages in disbelief. Harry thought she'd yell at him, but she did the unexpected.

"This is brilliant. Whoever had this book before knew their stuff. Half of these alterations are pure genius. I wonder who it belonged to." She muttered as she checked the front cover.

"This book is the property of the Half Blood Prince."

"Who's that?" Harry asked.

She looked at him with a frown.

"I don't know, but I think we need to do some research."

Harry grinned.

"To the Library!"

"After Defense Against the Dark Arts." She grabbed him by the wrist and dragged him to class, smiling all the way.

-X-X-X-X-X-

"Alright. To start this year off with a bang, you will each step forward and show me a spell you've learned last year. I will be calling people randomly, so no. Not all of you little punks will get a chance. So...Longbottom. Get your rear up here."

Harry watched in amusement as Professor Dumbledore leaned against his desk and eyed the dark haired boy who stepped forward. Neville had a smirk on his face as he faced the class.

"EXPECTO PATRONUM!"

A silver wolf burst out of his wand and sniffed the air, seemingly to find a target before it sat down and stared at the class. After a moment, Neville cancelled the Patronus and looked at Aberforth who nodded.

"Nice. Seems you were part of Potter's little organization. Well...seeing as most of you were trained by the runt, let's see what your teacher knows. Potter. Get your ass up here and dazzle me." He said in a mocking tone.

Harry stepped forward and thought for a moment before he grinned. He remembered the book on wandless magic that he and Hermione had been studying. While he was nowhere a master, meaning he couldn't pull off the larger spells without a wand, he could still do some of them. He raised his hand and aimed at the dummy across the room.

"Stupefy!"

Aberforth nearly had a heart attack as a red jet of light shot out of Harry's palm and slammed into the dummy. Harry grinned at Aberforth, who nodded.

"Okay. I'm dazzled. Rather impressive, I should say. Anyone who goes up against you will be in for a shock if they manage to disarm you. Though, they would latterly have to disarm you if they want to capture you." He said with a chuckle.

Harry sat down as Aberforth called up a few more students, but he kept his eyes on Harry. The boy knew that he would be having a rather interesting year.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Albus gave the young man in his room a small smile.

"Well, Harry. Seems you've caused quite a surprise for my dear old brother."

Harry gave him a nervous smile.

"Yes sir. Hermione received a book with instructions on wandless magic and we've been practicing. I can't do anything larger than a stunner at the moment without a wand."

Dumbledore nodded his head in understanding.

"Yes. It does take time to gain that mastery in one's education. Now, Harry. Do you know the history of Wandless magic?"

Harry nodded.

"Hermione made sure I understood what it was. She can be rather scary if you try to say no about studying."

Dumbledore chuckled.

"Yes. Most intelligent women can be scary if we men do something not necessarily correct. So what have you learned about it?"

"Well...it seems that the first wizards and witches didn't use wands for the first few millennium or so of magic's existence. But they started to notice that more and more of them were taking longer and longer to discover and learn how to use their magic. So they created conductors. Staffs and Wands. Staff's were used by mages who required a larger conductor, but they were able to use wandless magic. The every day wizard used wands. It was only meant to be a training tool so that the person learned what their magic felt like and how to form it into the different spells. Unfortunately, several pureblood families didn't like the fact that half-blood and muggleborn wizards and witches were able to cast away their wands earlier than pureblood children. A law was passed as a means to make it fair to the purebloods. Everyone would own a wand, but muggle born children would not be told of magic's existence until they were to come to school. And even then, the muggleborn and by extension half-blood children would be unable to practice outside of the school due to the secrecy needed back then. In short, we only use wands because the purebloods got jealous and wanted to keep their control over the magical world."

Dumbledore nodded his head.

"A very excellent summary. Very accurate as well. You see, Harry. Purebloods were slowly losing their abilities to use magic with out aid because of the interfamily breeding. That is why muggleborn wizards and witches were able to gain control of their magic so easy. Their blood was more pure magically than a purebloods, ironically, because they didn't have multiple magical signatures in their blood. To explain this Harry, I request you pay attention. It will be a bit boring, I'm afraid."

Harry nodded his understanding and made himself comfortable as the professor began.

"You see, when a witch or wizard is born, their magical core is unstable. It needs to create a magical signature, or aura to be technical. The aura is basically a combination of your magical ancestors. With a muggleborn, they are able to quickly gain an aura and their cores stabilize within five to seven years after birth. With a pureblood, their cores can't stabilize until the core is able to find the distinctive aura's of both parents and their direct descendants based on magic auras all the way back to the beginning of their family tree. But with so much inbreeding, the core takes longer to stabilize and to gather the different auras to create the person's magical signature. Their cores don't stabilize until nine to eleven years, with eleven being the most common age of stabilization. So if anyone is magically pure, it is the muggleborn students. Do you understand?"

Harry nodded but was still curious.

"What about half-blood students, like myself?"

"Half-blood students do take longer than muggleborn children, yes, but due to the lack of...shall we say, confusion, in their blood, they usually stabilize at around seven to nine years after birth, most commonly at eight."

Harry frowned,

"So basically, because muggleborns are the first in their families to have magic, they get the auras quicker and the magic stabilizes faster. And because they have no other magic in their lines, they are purer than the purebloods, who's blood is clogged with past signatures from all over their family tree. So...they technically have dirty blood."

Dumbledore gave him a wide smile.

"That is absolutely correct, Harry. Muggleborns are a revitalizing agent for our species, as are half-bloods. But sadly, those who hold the majority votes do not see this. And they even misconstrued what Salazar Slythrein had said when he describe the students he wanted to take in."

Harry raised an eyebrow.

"Really? How so, sir?"

"Salazaar wanted to take in all magic students, yes, but not because he believed that purebloods were superior, but because he knew they needed the most help with magic, because they, like he had, were having trouble using magic. He felt he'd be able to help them the most to gain their full potential. True, they were all cunning, and such, but if there was one thing Salazaar couldn't stand, it was a traitor. Betrayal by friend or family was of the highest dishonor and so he raised a basilisk and built his own chamber so that he could purge Hogwarts of those he felt were unworthy to study magic, which to him were traitors. That is why he wanted those who seemed like they would backstab others, so he could break them of that. So in fact, he wasn't evil like others made him out to be."

At this, Harry was completely blown away. Seems his impression of Slythrein House wasn't what he thought it was.

"But their evil. Slythrein house is full of those who go bad." Harry stated.

The oldman smiled.

"Tell me Harry. What do they all have in common?"

"Well...their untrustworthy. They'd probably betray their best friend if they could save their own skin. And they are mostly purebloods."

Dumbledore smiled even wider.

"Do you see now? The House only remained evil because Salazar's teachings have been twisted and warped to fit the pureblood bigotry. Make sense?"

Harry nodded his understanding, the revelation was rather interesting. The old headmaster smiled as Harry seemed to understand what he was trying to tell him. Dumbledore looked at the clock and frowned.

"Alas, Harry. Time has conspired against us. Dinner is upon us and why our minds are able, our bodies require sustenance. We'll talk later, my boy."

Harry said his good bye and hurried to the Great Hall.

-X-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry didn't like Slughorn. He seemed nice in the classroom, but once they sat down with him at one of his gatherings, it didn't take Harry long to realize he wanted power. And not the one out front with power, no. He wanted to be behind the scenes, pulling strings and reaping the benefits of knowing them. Harry defiantly didn't like him. Hermione seemed to be able to read his mind as they walked back to the Gryffindor Common Room.

"You don't like him, do you?" She asked, half amused.

"No. No I don't. It's like he's a collector, trying to gather up those who have great potential or have good connections."

Hermione nodded and the pair continued on. They entered the common room and quietly moved to the fire place to relax, or in Harry's case, to think.

"I wonder what Snape is up too?"

"Being a spy, what else?"

Harry did a double take at the fire as Hermione clapped a hand over her mouth, trying not to scream. For in the fire, sat the grinning head of Sirius Black. Harry frowned as he and Hermione kneeled by the fire.

"Shouldn't you be more cautious?" Hermione asked.

The man frowned at her before he stuck out his tongue.

"Stop being a nag. Your not married yet, Miss Granger."

Harry smirked as Hermione glared at him.

"Watch yourself or I'll glue your tongue to the roof of your mouth."

Sirius wisely moved the conversation in a different direction.

"So. I hear they brought old Sluggy back to teach. And knowing him, he's tried to recruit you both, am I correct?"

Both nodded.

"Hmm...well...it was expected. Now, as for Snape, it seems Mister Riddle, being the paranoid berk he is, pulled Snape away from the school. Apparently he thinks Dumbledore might corrupt him." Sirius snorted. "Snape's too greasy to be corrupted. Add to the fact that he is watching Draco, and sabotaging him every step, just makes this year a hell of a jumble."

Harry looked glanced at Hermione to see her face. Seems she agreed with Sirius. The rest of their conversation didn't turn up any new information.

-X-X-X-X-X-

"Ah, Harry. Your early."

Harry nodded to the Head Master and sat in front of his desk. The oldman pulled out an old diary that took Harry a moment to recognize it as Riddle's diary from second year. Harry cocked his head to the side, making the oldman smile.

"I told you I would eventually explain to you what all this meant. Well...it seems tonight is the time. What you see before you Harry, is a Horcrux. More precisely, one of several."

Harry looked at him in confusion. Dumbledore continued.

"A Horcrux, Harry, is a very dark object in which one stores part of their soul inside it. To do so, the caster is required to kill. You see, Harry. Killing split's the soul, when it is done in cold blood. The caster uses the damage to their advantage and extract the damaged portion. Tom, has taken it far beyond what anyone else has every done. But in doing so, he has become unstable."

"Do you know what they are, and how many he has?"

Dumbledore nodded.

"Yes. You'll remember in your fourth year, when you were in a shared dream with Miss Granger, I take it?"

Harry nodded and the oldman continued.

"I used it as a chance to see if one of my theories were correct. I am sad to say that it was indeed. I discovered, Harry, that you yourself are an unintentional Horcrux. One created by sheer accident."

Harry was floored.

"But...does that mean...?"

"No." Dumbledore answered the unfinished question. "You are you, not Tom. Despite the fact that part of his soul resides in you, it makes you no more Voldemort than me. But as for the others, I believe that two of them are from the founders, Ravenclaw, Hufflepuff, and Slythrein. Also, I believe that his snake may be one as well. He seems to have an abnormal amount of control over it, even being a parselmouth."

"Any others, sir?"

Dumbledore smiled and dropped a ring on the table.

"These two were destroyed. The diary by you and the ring by me."

Harry counted the items in his head.

"So he made six intentionally, and one on accident, equaling seven. How do we destroy them?" Harry asked.

"By damaging the containers so much that the magic inside the object can not repair it."

"What about the one I carry?" He asked.

Dumbledore paused.

"I do not know. Death is one of the solutions. The others...are almost as extreme."

Harry felt his heart weigh heavily as the information sunk in. Dumbledore decided that it might be best to change the subject.

"For now, Harry, do not worry about the one you carry. I'm still researching methods of cleaning an object, so don't lose hope yet. But I feel that I must let you in on a plan, Harry. One that will be executed at the end of the term. But I must have your word that you will follow through with it."

Harry nodded his head without question, making the oldman smile.

"Very good. You see Harry. I only have till the end of this term. In my foolishness, I failed to perceive the danger of the ring. And now, I'm slowly dying. Seeing as death is my fate, I have concocted a plan to remove a new, and dangerous Death Eater from the school."

"Malfoy." Harry muttered.

"Indeed. He has been behind the unfortunate incident with Miss Bell and has been trying to kill me, even though the attempts are...half cocked at best. Severus Snape has been tasked by me to kill me."

Harry wanted to yell at how stupid that was, but paused at Dumbledore's raised hand.

"Relax, Harry. Severus has been helping fight Tom for years and if all goes according to plan, we will have someone deep in the ranks who will be able to pass us information and to keep our interests safe. As is, he was rather against the idea, going so far as to blast my door away as he stormed out of my office. But, the plan must go forth. For tonight, however, I want you to enjoy your time with Miss Granger. Though if I may be as bold, the Room of Requirements is a rather remarkable room, able to make anything we need. If you find

yourselves wanting...privacy, I'd suggest there." He stated with a kind smile.

Harry left with a very red face.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry looked at the book with confusion before he looked back at Hermione. She looked at him expectantly.

"Well?" She asked.

Harry looked back at it and had to agree, it looked like a good idea.

"It looks good. But how'd you figure out these were it?" He asked her, handing the book back.

"I did my research, Harry. The only surviving artifacts of those three founders are Slytherin's locket, Hufflepuff's cup, and Ravenclaw's Diadem. Gryffindor's only remaining possession besides the sorting hat is the sword you killed the basilisk with in second year."

Harry shook his head and leaned back in his seat as Hermione put her book back before dropping down next to Harry, rubbing her temples.

"I also found out that Snape is the Half Blood Prince. Seems his father was a muggle and his mother was a pureblood."

Harry placed an arm around her and pulled her close. Hermione sighed and relaxed into him, her head on his shoulder.

"Why can't this be easy? Just this once?" She whispered, eyes closed.

"Because if life were easy, then even something like falling on love would have no challenge to it. The best things in life are worth the effort. If defeating Riddle makes this world safe for you and our children, let it be hard."

Hermione looked up at him as he stared into the fire, his face firm with determination.

"What about you? Are you not in our future?"

"I have to die. It's the only way to destroy this bloody Horcrux in me."

Hermione turned his face to her's, capturing his lips briefly, before pulling away. She looked into his eyes, looking deep into him.

"We'll find away, Harry, to remove it without you dieing. You'll survive. We'll survive. And we'll have a big family. Big enough to give Molly a run for her money." She said with a smile.

Harry chuckled.

"Sorry. I think only three would be a good idea."

Hermione smirked as she leaned in again.

"Well...the effort making them would be worth it." She said in a sultry voice.

Harry blinked before he grinned.

"Who's says we have to get you pregnant each time?"

Hermione looked thoughtful before kissing him again, using her tongue to make him melt to her touch.

"True. But we may be rusty." She said, teasing him as she dropped her hand over not so little Harry.

Harry, understandably, caught on quickly. It also helped that she was running a finger over his length as it tried to mimic his right leg, making half way down his thigh.

"Can't have that. After all. Hermione Granger doesn't just achieve..."

She gave him a million watt smile.

"She over achieves." She finished.

Harry was just starting to like the direction the conversation was going when...

"Harry! Can you come here a minute?"

Harry looked over to see Ginny smiling at him. A quick glance down south showed that he was retreating back to the jungle. Not exactly a good thing in his book. Hermione glared at Ginny. Harry decided to intervene before things went to hell and went over to see what she wanted.

"What do you want?" He asked, a bit colder than he had planned.

Ginny handed him a goblet, smiling.

"Good. Once the neutralizer hits his system, it'll break that little muggleborn whore's control over him. Then he'll obviously confess his undying love for me and whisk me off my feet and marry me. Then we'll have a big family and live in a castle and every girl will envy me."

These thoughts weren't noticed by Harry as he looked at the liquid in the cup. The charms that Hermione had placed on his watch weren't going off, so it didn't have any kind of controlling substance like love potion in it. Harry shrugged his shoulders and took a sip. He noticed that the taste of the liquid was off and couldn't place his finger on where he had tasted it before. He gave her a strange look.

"Tastes weird. Where'd you get mead-"

Harry's sentence went unfinished as the goblet fell from his grasp, his form rigid. All eyes locked on Harry as the goblet smashed to the ground. The dark haired boy began to shake before he dropped to the ground, foam coming out of his mouth. Ginny stumbled back in fear and confusion as Harry began to convulse on the ground. Ron, surprisingly was moving to the portrait hole, sprinting off to find a teacher. Hermione gave a scream and rushed over to the boy, dropping down to his side, trying in desperation to figure out what was wrong. Harry's eyes had rolled up into his head, displaying the whites of his eyes as his convulsions shook him harder. Ginny was shoved out of the way by Neville who dropped down next to them as well. After several minutes, Harry stopped shaking. Neville placed his fingers on Harry's throat, searching for a pulse. His face went from concentration to fear to sadness as he looked up at Hermione. She shook her head, tears falling from her eyes as Neville looked at her sadly.

"I'm...I'm sorry Hermione. There's no pulse."

Those words shocked the common room as Hermione burst into tears, pulling Harry's limp form close to her, rocking back and forth. Neville placed a hand on her shoulder before he rose to his feet and fixing Ginny with a hard stare.

"Why? Because you couldn't have him? Is that why you poisoned him?"

Ginny back away, everyone glaring at her as Hermione cried in pain as she held Harry Potter's body.

"N-no! I didn't! I only added a neutralizer to the mead!"

Neville looked at her in disbelief.

"You seriously thought Hermione was using magic to control him?"

"YES!" Ginny burst into tears. "Why else would he have chosen her over me!"

Neville shook his head in disgust.

"By her you mean muggleborn, don't you? But your right. She did use magic on him. And ancient and pure kind of magic. Wanna know what it's called? Don't bother answering because it's love. Pure love. Want to know something else? Harry and Hermione were going to be parents last year, but that bitch Bellatrix LeStrange used the torture curse on Hermione and they lost the baby."

The common room was in hushed silence as Neville bared down on the shaking girl. He had known because Harry had confided in him prior to term end last year.

"They were brought closer because of it. And now your fixation with Harry and your dense and arrogant outlook has killed him. Why do you think your were entitled to him? Because you look a bit like Lily Potter? My Gran told me that the Potter men were drawn to intelligent and selfless witches. Which you are not. I suggest you go to your dorm before some one here does something they'll regret." Neville told her in a hard tone.

"She'll stay. I'd like to know where she got the mead." A stern voice spoke out.

Everyone turned and saw McGonagall, Dumbledore, Aberforth, and Slughorn. The Dumbledore and Slughorn moved to Harry and Hermione, Dumbledore trying to comfort Hermione while Slughorn furrowed his brow, muttering incantations as he waved his wand over Harry's body. Aberforth had the mead glass in his hands and was waving his wand over it, muttering spells as well while McGonagall was looked at Ginny with a stern look.

"Well, Miss Weasley?" She demanded.

Ginny gulped in fear.

"I...I stole it from Professor Slughorn's office. I want to impress Harry and to get him to drink the neutralizer potion." She said, ashamed.

Aberforth looked grimly at Minerva.

"If we'd have gotten here sooner, we might have saved him. Or if someone has a beezor on them. Ingenius, though. Scentless poison. Only someone of my, Albus', or Horace's caliber in potions could have detected the very slight scent of the poison."

As if on cue, Slughorn sighed sadly and lowered his head as he closed Harry's eyes.

"I'm sorry. It was a fast acting neural poison. Causes convulsions and seizures before total bodily failure. Only a beezor would have saved him."

Hermione meanwhile had went from crying in pain to unstoppable rage as she tried to claw her way out of Dumbledore's grasp.

"I'LL KILL THAT BITCH!"

Dumbledore was holding on, using strength that was surprising at his age.

"Miss Granger. Tell me. Would Harry have approved of you killing Miss Weasley?"

Hermione stopped before bursting into tears again.

"No. He wouldn't have. He'd tell me she wouldn't be worth it and it would only bring more pain to the world."

Dumbledore gave her a sad smile.

"Very wise words from him that even the bravest of us lack the courage to follow."

No one in the tower moved an inch as they each mourned the passing of one of their own. Harry Potter had died because of a stupid little girl with a crush who couldn't move on.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry slowly opened his eyes and noted with a curious sense that his clothes were missing. This would not do. He didn't feel that he needed clothes, but he rather didn't like the idea of walking around nude. He concentrated on clothes and was pleased to see his school clothes appear on his person. Next he realized that he had been lying flat on his back. The young wizard rose to his feet and looked around. The bright white light faded away and he found himself outside of a manor. It was quite a nice looking home. And it felt very familiar. The boy slowly made his way to the door and opened it. He could hear voices, and a few laughs coming from the sitting room. Harry walked into the room, no awkward feeling as he took in the sights around the room. Two men with his likeness looked up at him, both with surprise while a woman with fiery red hair and green eyes gave him a smile.

"Hello, Harry. Please. Take a seat."

Harry did as he was told and sat in front of the three looking at him. One of the males had brown eyes that looked very familiar. The man even looked about Harry's age, while the other draped his arm around the woman. The man with brown eyes looked at him in awe. Harry was starting to feel uncomfortable at his gaze.

"I don't mean to be rude, but who are you all?" He asked.

The man and woman smiled while the other male cocked his head to the side.

"I'm James. And this is Lily. We're your Mum and Dad." The man with the woman said proudly.

Harry smiled and nodded as they moved over to sit with him. But Harry still didn't know who the third man was.

"Who are you?" He asked.

The man gulped before giving him an embarrassed smile.

"Well...you never got the chance to meet me...Dad. I was to be named Jonathan Remus Potter in honor of Granddad Granger and Great Uncle Mooney. You can call me Jack."

Harry slowly stood and walked over to the other man who began to de-age to that of a five year old boy. Harry dropped down and looked him in the eye before smiling and pulling the boy into a hug.

"It's nice to meet my son." He said softly.

He could feel the boy start to sob as Harry picked him up and sat back down with his parents.

"As much as I like this, why am I here? Last time I checked, you were all dead. Oh...I'm dead."

James chuckled.

"Not exactly. You see...your in limbo. But the fact that your body had two souls kinda bugged up the dead thing and Death has offered you a choice."

Harry was intrigued.

"What's my choice?"

"Go on, into the afterlife where your father, Jack, and I are. Or return to earth to your love and your friends."

Harry sighed and leaned back in his chair as his son looked at him excitedly.

"Daddy? What's Mummy like?" He asked.

"She's very smart, Jack. Very beautiful as well and she loves you very much, even though we never got to meet you."

Jack nodded his understanding before giving him a curious look.

"Are you going back?"

"It would be easy to go, wouldn't it? But...a hero's strength is measured by his heart. If I go back, pain and hardship will be there. And if I leave them, it'll mean defeat. No I won't accept defeat. It'll be an uphill slope, but I can't lose hope. I'll go the distance and finish this."

Jack smiled at him and hugged him again.

"It's okay, Dad. I knew you'd make the right choice."

Harry hugged his son as Lily and James joined in the hug.

"We're proud of you son. And we'll always be with you." James told him.

"We'll see you again, but hopefully not for a few hundred years. We love you very much Harry." His mother had tears in her eyes as she pulled away.

Jack pulled back and gave Harry a look of pride.

"And I'm proud to be your son. Even though I didn't get the chance to live, I still had a soul ready for when I came. Go kick old moldy butt's ass dad!" He son stated.

"Jonathan Remus Potter! Language!" Harry scolded.

Jack gave him a look of humor.

"You sound like mum."

Harry grinned.

"She rubbed off on me." He told him.

"As much fun as this is, it's time for you to make a choice." James told him.

Harry nodded and closed his eyes, and made his choice.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Dumbledore was just about to clear the area so he could move the body when something very miraculous happened. Harry gave a deep shuddering gasp as he fought for air, his eyes snapping open as he shot into sitting position. Slughorn yelped in surprise as he fell on his back side. Aberforth did a double take as McGonagall's jaw dropped. Albus smiled happily as Hermione practically tackled Harry, hugging him tightly, sobbing into his shoulder. Harry found himself moved to the infirmary for observation, and Hermione never left his side that night. Dumbledore knew how Harry survived. And he could honestly say that for the first time, he thanked Tom Riddle for his stupidity in dealing with the Potters. They always pulled off the impossible.

Yay! Chapter 10 is up and running! And about the author note, I actually rather do like the twilight series. The only thing I wanted to show was that what one decides is right (i.e. wtahcing someone sleep to understand them (BTW, Moon Goddess, it's creepy no matter how you try to make it sound. You talk to and befriend someone to understand them(And Pattison is just a pretty boy, but a hell of an actor.))) Don't forget to leave a review. The buttons like an inch below this and requires what...ten seconds for you to type a review? Please drop one.

Chapter XI

Wake Me Up

Dumbledore sensed something was wrong. And it had to do with Mister Potter. So like anyone seeking knowledge, he turned to his own personal library and began his research. It was long an grueling to be sure. But he could not shake the feeling that something about Harry was off. It was almost as if his personality had shifted this past month and a half. And he needed to find out why, fast.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Ginny Weasley had been removed from Hogwarts for questioning with an expulsion hearing and criminal charges as well and the rest of the Gryffindors couldn't be happier. They all welcomed Harry back after he'd gotten released from the hospital wing. They had noticed a distinct change in him, but they dismissed it as he reaction to almost being dead. According to Professor Slughorn, the neutralizer actually weakened it enough to temporarily stop bodily functions before his system overwhelmed the effects and revived him. Everyone but Hermione bought this story. She knew more than enough about poisons to know that not even a Neutralizer could weaken a strong poison like that, but she did know how he really survived. But Hermione did notice him acting...colder. He seemed to smirk...no...sneer was the word to describe it. His voice had taken on a slightly greasy tone when he spoke to the teachers, almost trying to talk his way into their good graces or to avoid trouble. And every time she tried to be near him or talk to him, he'd tell her it wasn't a good time and that he'd let her know when he wanted to talk. His eyes had flashed with...anger was the only thing she could say it was when she'd tried last time. His voice was colder and harsher. This was going too far. This wasn't the Harry she knew and she was going to find out just who this person was. She only prayed it wasn't who she thought it was.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry opened his eyes in shock and was thrown backwards into the couch. It took a moment for his dazed state to pass before he rose back to his feet. His parents were still here, looking at him in shock as well while Jack was frowning as he aged to thirteen.

"What just happened?" He asked.

Jack managed to answer before James or Lilly.

"Riddle. I don't know how, but somehow he held on long enough in your body to wait for your soul to leave, even if it was temporary, to take control. Now...he has a body."

"No the bloody hell he doesn't." Harry challenged.

Jack nodded his head.

"Yes, Dad, he does. He has complete control over your body. And no one knows the difference right now."

Harry dropped to the ground, defeat etched on his face.

"Then he's won. He finally got rid of me."

"No. He hasn't."

Harry looked up to see his father kneeling in front of him.

"But...how can I beat him when he has my body?"

James smiled.

"Surely you've heard of possessions?"

Harry nodded in confusion.

"But aren't those temporary control?"

"Yes, because a foreign soul is trying to force you out of your own body. But with you, your body will recognize you as the true soul of it and will help you push Riddle out of it. But even if you do push him out of your body, you won't destroy him." James explained.

"How do I destroy him?"

"There is two options. One is a dark curse that destroys ghosts. I don't know if it will work against Riddle, but the chances are high. The other option is fail safe. Since Voldemort is a being of such

anger and darkness, a spell with enough happiness and light poured into it will destroy him."

"A Patronus!" Harry breathed.

James smirked.

"Yep. Prongs will destroy that bastard."

The boy nodded and rose back to his feet, looking around the room.

"Alright. I'm going back. And I'll kick Riddle out of my body and destroy him."

"That's my boy!" James whooped as Lilly hugged her son.

Harry looked back over to Jack to see him at what appeared to be his original age of sixteen. The boy was the spitting image of Harry.

"You know." Harry started, smirking. "You look just like your father. Except your eyes. You've got-"

"My mother's eyes. Just like my Dad has his mother's." Jack finished with a smirk.

Harry grinned and clasped hands with Jack.

"Tell Mum I said hi and I'm with Granddad and Gran Potter."

"Will do. I love you all and I'll see you later."

Harry let go of Jack's hand and concentrated hard on returning to Earth. Slowly he faded from view, leaving smiling trio as they turned their attention back to Earth. Harry would win. That they were sure of.

-x-x-x-x-x-

Albus gave a startled gasp as he read over the Horcrux destruction. It stated:

"When one destroys a Horcrux, it is very obvious. It is not an easy thing to miss. You see, once the object has been rendered harmed

beyond magical repair, the watcher, if one is present, will see the soul come out of the object. Mostly a green mist that will form into the being who placed it there. The soul will, if sufficiently weakened from the destruction, will scream and vanish. If it is strong, such as feeding off another soul or having lived in another being, it will be able to leave and find a place to return to this world."

The old man looked sadly at the book as he closed it. They hadn't vanquished the shattered remains of Tom Riddle. They'd only lost the most important person in the world. This was not how things were supposed to happen. But now, the headmaster had to fix this...abomination before it cause any harm. He grabbed his wand and headed out of his office, praying Lilly, James, and most especially Harry, forgave him for what he had to do.

-X-X-X-X-X-

'Harry' walked purposefully through the school, smirking as he did. These fools didn't understand that the boy who lived was gone. In his place was the one and only, Tom Riddle. 'Harry' scowled as the name popped into his head. How he had detested his muggle father. Had the man actually stayed and helped to raise him, he might have a different view. But no. Even his own father had shown him just what he thought of magic and all who practiced it. No. He would wreck havoc on the muggle world and all those dirty blooded mongrels and their blood traitor allies. He rounded a corner and caught sight of one of his Death Eaters' son. Young Draco looked a lot like his father, complete with sneer. His blood seethed. If the Malfoy's were as faithful as they had claimed, he'd already be back and have control of the UK by now. All it proved was that they respected and feared those with power over them and clung to that individual as a life raft. 'Harry' glared at the Malfoy brat with pure hatred. The boy merely sneered at him.

"What do you think your sneering at, Potter? Damned Blood Traitor is what you are."

'Harry' became livid as he sent a blast of pure magical energy at Malfoy, throwing him into the wall, a sickening sound filled the entrance hall as Malfoy struggled to stand. Draco glared at him and raised his wand.

"Cru-OHHHH!"

'Harry' sent a particularly strong banishing charm at Malfoy, throwing him through the front doors. He stormed out of the entrance hall, his cloak billowing menacingly behind him as he came to Malfoy's form. The young boy struggled to rise to his feet.

"Listen here, young Malfoy. I will not, I repeat NOT stand for a cowering piece of filth like you to call ME a blood traitor. You and your whole family had better be thankful the Dark Lord hasn't gotten his hands on them yet for their betrayal." He seethed.

Draco looked at him in fear.

"W-what..." His eyes widened as he noticed the serpentine eyes and his voice became hushed. "My Lord...but...how? You're at the LeStrange's."

'Harry' blinked. He was already back? Huh. And seeing as to how he was supposed to be at LeStrange's home, maybe they did revive him. Weird. 'Harry' pulled his wand away from the young boy and gave him a cool look.

"Get out of my sight. Do not speak of this to anyone. Not even Lucias. I will reveal myself when the time is right. Now go!" He ordered.

Malfoy, with the help of Crabbe and Goyle headed back into the castle. 'Harry' was just starting to enjoy the quiet when...

"Harry!"

He tried to control his anger as he rounded on the girl in question as she walked toward him. 'Harry' had no time for her games.

"I told you we'd speak when I wanted to. Now leave." He hissed.

Her eyes hardened as she stopped.

"What happened to you Harry? You've changed."

'Harry' lost it at this point. He rounded on Hermione with anger and rage in his eyes.

"Are you deaf, mud blood? I said leave me alone."

Hermione's eyes widened as she took a step back. She's seen the snake like eyes as they flash in anger. She felt her heart shatter as the body of her lover was being used for evil. 'Harry' sneered.

"I see you figured it out. But now I have to remove you. I can't have anyone finding out."

He lazily flicked his wand and Hermione felt three different spells activate. One was a silencing charm. The others were a disarming spell and a leg lock jinx. He sneered even wider.

"Yes. It's a shame no one will find you here for a few hours. These parts of the grounds are hardly ever used by anyone. How does it feel, girl, to know that your lover's body is about to torture you into insanity? Poor Harry. If he's seeing this from the afterlife, he must be boiling mad. To have his body, wand, and magic destroy the woman he loves. I only wish I could see his face. Crucio!"

Hermione felt like her very nerves were on fire. Pain shot through her body, making her convulse from her pain induced spasms. After what felt like an eternity, the spell was broke. She hadn't even realized that the Headmaster had arrived until he spoke.

"You've made another foolish mistake, Tom."

Hermione felt the silencing charm and the leg lock removed, but she remained where she was. Dumbledore moved forward, wand raised as Tom sneered at him.

"Your too late, oldman. Just like you were too late to save the boy. Now, his body and power are mine. I wonder how the world will react when they see the Boy Who Lived on the right hand of Lord Voldemort."

"No one will ever see that, because I'm here to finish this, Tom. Each time I have faced you, I let my conscious get in the way. Because each time, I thought there was still good in you. I thought you could be saved. But after learning how you survived, I no longer will hold back."

Riddle's sneer turned into a glare.

"You dare say I won on your mercy? You'll die for that, oldman! Avada Kedavra! "

The oldman vanished in a swish of his cloak and reappeared behind him. With a precise flick, a sliver jet shot at Riddle. Tom was not going to be outdone. He sent another killing

curse at Dumbledore but missed, instead hitting the tree behind the old wizard, which burst into flame. Dumbledore flicked his own wand in return, sending a golden beam at the evil wizard. Tom was forced to conjure a shining silver shield out of thin air to deflect it. The spell, whatever it was, caused no visible damage to the shield, though a deep, gong-like note reverberated from it. Tom paused and gave Dumbledore a funny look.

"You seek to kill me? You are actually using your knowledge and power to try to kill me. And here I thought you were above such brutality."

"We both know that there are other ways of destroying a man, Tom," Dumbledore said calmly, continuing to walk towards Tom. "But taking your life would most defiantly satisfy the masses, even though I could do much worse."

"There is nothing worse than death, Dumbledore!" Riddle snarled.

"You are quite wrong," said Dumbledore, "Indeed, your failure to understand that there are things much worse than death has always been your greatest weakness. No matter. All this time I have given you, and you still failed to realize that."

Another jet of green light flew from behind the silver shield, missing the Head Master by a hair. Dumbledore drew back his wand and waved it as though brandishing a whip. A long thin flame flew from the tip; it wrapped itself around Voldemort, shield and all. For a moment, it seemed Dumbledore had won, but then the fiery rope became a serpent, which relinquished its hold on Voldemort at once and turned, hissing furiously, to face Dumbledore. Voldemort vanished; the snake reared from the floor, ready to strike.

There was a burst of flame in midair above Dumbledore just as Voldemort reappeared, sending another jet of green light flew at

Dumbledore. Just before it hit, Fawkes swooped down in front of Dumbledore and took the killing curse himself, bursting into flames and fell to the ground, small, wrinkled and flightless. Dumbledore prepared himself to strike, but an angry voice boomed through the grounds.

"RIDDLE!"

Both combatants looked toward the castle to see an eerie sight, There stood Harry in all his ghostly glory, his pale eyes shining with anger and rage. The soul glared at Riddle and all three could feel the power pouring off of the specter. Riddle took a step back as he raised the wand at the image.

"What is this magic?"

Dumbledore smiled at Riddle.

"You know what I believe it is."

"No. Love is weak. It can not overcome death!" Tom spat.

Dumbledore gave him an amused look as he pointed at Harry.

"Then explain him."

Riddle could not. But Harry wasn't there just to scare him. He began to walk toward Hermione as she looked at him with tears running down her cheeks.

"You're...you're really dead." Her voice was choked with emotion.

Harry bent down and placed a hand on her cheek, feeling the warmth from her skin. She closed her eyes tightly as more tears came.

"No matter what, 'Mione, I'll always be here with you." He told her as he placed a kiss on her forehead.

She nodded her head as she rose to her feet, trying to hold back her pain from both the torture curse and knowing that Harry was indeed dead. Harry had seen the pain on her face as she rose and turned to Riddle, glaring holes in the man.

"Your time is up, Riddle."

The evil spirit sneered.

"Just try it."

"Hermione. Professor." Harry called over his shoulder. "I need you both to cast a Patronus and have them charge whatever comes out of the body. Even if it looks like me."

Dumbledore knew what he was getting at and nodded his head in understanding as Harry squared himself to Riddle. The other man had no idea how to deal with this new turn of events and did the only thing he could think of. He raised his wand and sent a jet of dark blue at Harry. The specter deflected the spell away from him and into the lake where a geyser erupted. The Ghost roared in rage and charged Riddle; who continued to fire off curses that seemed to be deflected off of it. With a final scream of primal rage, Harry leapt forward and dived into his own body. The now vegetative body was thrown back from the impact and landed in a heap where it began to spasm as the two souls fought for dominance. Hermione started forward, but Dumbledore caught her.

"No! Don't touch him!" He ordered as they watched the scene play out in front of them.

Inside the body, Harry grabbed the soul fragment by its throat and squeezed with all his strength.

"Get the hell out of my body." He hissed at the evil spirit.

"N-Never! I...control...it!" It struggled out.

Harry pulled back his fist and punched the specter.

"GET THE FUCK OUT!" He screamed again.

"NO!"

Harry was thrown back away from Riddle who took a shuddering gasp as he massaged his throat. Harry rose back to his feet as Riddle glared at him.

"Magic won't work here. It's a battle of wills." Harry stated as he moved forward.

Riddle launched himself at Harry, pummeling every inch of him he could reach, with Harry returning the favor. After several moments, they pulled away, taking deep breaths. Harry didn't waste time and moved forward, kicking him in the face, knocking him on his back. The teen leapt onto him, pinning him down as he rained blow after blow into Riddle's face.

"You made one major error, Riddle. You hurt Hermione. I'LL KILL YOU!" Harry bellowed, hefting the man up.

Using all his strength, he pulled Riddle out of the body. Outside, time had hardly passed when they appeared outside the body. Riddle had taken the form of Harry, still looking beat up.

"P-Professor! Quickly! He's trying to confuse you! He's Riddle!"

The other Harry looked over at Dumbledore.

"Use the Patronus on us both. Only the real Riddle will be affected by it."

Dumbledore sent out his Patronus, a phoenix, and ordered it to charge them both. The bird crashed against them, but couldn't dissolve the now screaming Riddle. Harry looked at Hermione as he maintained his grip on Riddle.

"Hermione! Now!" He roared.

The girl looked at Harry, tears in her eyes as she sent forth her own Patronus, using her and Harry's first kiss as power for her otter. The little otter shot forth and slammed into Riddle, tearing him apart as he screamed. After several moments, Harry let the soul go as it began to wither and scream in pain as it began to dissolve into nothingness. Harry stumbled to his body before he collapsed to the ground. Hermione started forward with Dumbledore, but both stopped as they saw three figures materialize around Harry. They watched as they helped him stand and carried his form to his own body before gently lowering him into his body. The beings looked up at Dumbledore and Hermione and smiled at them.

"Hello, Professor."

Dumbledore's eyes twinkled as he returned their smiles.

"Hello Lilly. James. Who's this young man you have with you?" He asked.

Lilly and James smiled as the young man walked over to Hermione, slowly morphing into a smaller figure. Dumbledore estimated him to be eleven and noticed a very striking resemblance to Harry. The boy stopped in front of the girl and stuck out his hand.

"Hello. My name is Jonathan Remus Potter. It's nice to finally meet you, Mum."

Hermione covered her mouth with her hands as her eyes went wide.

"You're...you're..."

The boy nodded.

"I am your unborn child. I with Granddad and Granny Potter, so don't be sad."

As if on cue, both parents walked over to the girl as Dumbledore checked on Harry, for he knew this was a private moment for them and decided to make himself discreet. Meanwhile, Lilly placed a hand on Hermione's shoulder, smiling at the young girl.

"I want to thank you. You've managed to keep him level headed all these years and have always been there for him. And I know you always will."

James smirked as he looked over at Hermione.

"Yeah. But the next generation is gonna defiantly be a bunch of Marauders. I wish you luck."

"JAMES!"

The man grinned sheepishly as he wished her well as well. Jack looked down at his watch and frowned.

"Our time is up. We've succeeded and it's time to head back." He looked back up to Hermione. "I just wanna say, Mum, that I love you. I know we didn't get to meet, but know that I would have inherited your brains and common sense along with your eyes and hair color, while I had Dad's trouble making abilities, his ingeniousness, and his eyesight."

Hermione smiled as she crouched down to his level and pulled him into a hug, surprised that he was solid. After a moment she pulled away and gave him a small smile.

"Well...you would have been perfect."

The boy grinned and nodded before heading over to the point the appeared at. Both Lilly and James gave her a hug and another thanks for loving their son before they went and stood next to a now older Jack. They all waved as they faded from view. Hermione watched them go and felt sadness but it was replaced by happiness from the rough gasp let out by Harry. Dumbledore pointed his wand at Harry and held up his hand to Hermione.

"How was the Patronus able to defeat Voldemort?"

Harry blinked before he nodded his head.

"Because he was a being of such hatred and evil that only a spell of pure love and happiness could defeat him. A Patronus."

Dumbledore didn't seem satisfied.

"What is Miss Granger's middle name?"

"Jane. Why?" He asked.

Dumbledore let out a sigh and lowered his wand just before a Hermione shaped missile struck Harry, her lips locking onto his, and knocking him flat on his back. Dumbledore raised an eyebrow and let out a small cough. Nothing. Hermione was still kissing him with such a fever, that Dumbledore knew where this was going and didn't think it wise for them to do that outside. That and he really didn't want to see it.

"AHEM!" He said loudly.

Hermione pulled back, gasping for air as Harry went crossed eyed, his face blank and his eyes glazed over. The girl looked over to Dumbledore, face bright red.

"As much as I know you wished to continue, might I suggest the Room of Requirements. Not that I condone such activities, I just know you two have a lot to talk about and that room will ensure the wrong ears do not over hear you."

The girl nodded and helped Harry to his feet and they set off to the seventh floor.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Christmas was just around the corner for Hogwarts. Harry had fully recovered from his recent fight with high spirits. But his last encounter with Malfoy had shaken him up.

(Flash Back)

Harry was fuming. He and Hermione had tried out a spell he found in his potions book on a few target dummies and had immediately decided that it was a dark spell. The dummy had received deep gashes across it's chest in area Hermione was sure would have created fatal blood loss in anyone. Harry joked that it would be a hell of a spell against Trolls to which she gave him her famous Look. Every male knows not to make eye contact, but Harry remembered that rule to late and backed down from the suggestion. So here he was, walking down the corridor when he noticed a sound coming out of Moaning Myrtles bathroom. It was a guy crying in a girls bathroom! Harry slowly opened the door and entered. He walked forward a bit before he heard Malfoy's voice.

"I can't do it. I can't. But mother...She'll die if I don't."

Harry stepped forward, careful to make sure he wasn't seen in the mirror.

"Then don't. Dumbledore can help you out."

Malfoy spun around, wand raised, but paused when he saw that Harry simply raised his hands.

"I'm not here to hurt you. But now I know why you act the way you do. And I'd be just as conflicted if my mother's life was on the line."

Malfoy screwed his face up in anger.

"You know nothing! Give me one reason why I shouldn't kill you now!"

"Because I can help. Or...at least I know some one who can. You've got options."

"I haven't got any options!" said Malfoy. "I've got to do it! He'll kill me! He'll kill my whole family!"

"I appreciate the difficulty of your position," said Harry. "Why else do you think you haven't confronted yet? Because you would have been murdered if Voldemort realized that you were suspected."

Malfoy lowered his wand.

"How...How can they help?"

Harry stayed where he was, not wanting to risk antagonizing the distraught teen.

"Dumbledore can send the order to secure your mum tonight if need be. And you can still 'try' on your mission, and 'fail'. Do you honestly believe that he thought you'd be able to kill Dumbledore?"

Malfoy shook his head.

"No...I don't think he does." The boy looked up at Harry. "What's our next step Po-I mean Harry?"

Harry smiled lightly as he stepped forward, placing a hand on Draco's shoulder.

"We go and see Dumbledore, Draco. Trust me. He'll have a plan."

(End Flashback)

In the end, Dumbledore brought Draco in on the plan which would involve him continuing his work on the vanishing Cabinets and it would tie in with his original plan of having Snape kill Dumbledore. Harry still didn't like it, but the dark energies the ring had released into his arm could not be removed, or cured, so the oldman chose his own time and place of his death. The young Potter shook his head and headed toward Snape's location for a meeting. He'd been called back to the school just for this night. Harry just hoped it wouldn't turn into a duel.

"Enter, Potter."

Harry opened the door and entered his private office and saw a very tired looking Snape gripping the edge of the desk where his pensive was placed.

"Sir?"

"It's nothing, Potter." He said, waving his hand dismissively. "I've just been looking through a few old memories, trying to find out why I decided to play spy. Anyway. The Headmaster asked me to check your mental shields. I understand you and Miss Granger managed to master it, yes?"

At Harry's nod, Snape pulled out his wand.

"Let's see then."

Harry felt a familiar presense at the outer most layer of his shields. These were in place just as a warning point. Like an intruder alarm. Harry didn't fight back, as it was only a check to see how well they were constructed. He felt Snape come across his primary shield. This one was strong enough to hold him up for several seconds until Harry allowed him past. Inside it's walls were general memories, where as the outer ring had meaningless memories. Finally, Snape found his secondary wall and stop his movement. Inside this wall were memories and knowledge that could harm him and those he cared about. Things such as addresses and other important information. It took the man almost two minutes to get through this portion and only after Harry allowed him past. And finally, he came across the strongest shield in Harry's mind. In it were secrets he would allow no one to know or take from him. This is were he stored

all of the most important things. After several seconds, Snape retreated from his mind, having not been able to break through his final layer. The man nodded his head in satisfaction.

"Good. I suspect you allowed me past the secondary shield you had. You should strengthen your primary though. That way they won't get a hold of things like what your favorite desert is."

Harry gave a sheepish grin as he agreed with the Professor. Snape kept his face neutral and dismissed him saying his shields would work for now, but he wanted them stronger.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Christmas came and went with Harry spending time at the Grangers again. Sirius even joined them stating he didn't want to be left with just Buckbeak and Kreacher in the house. Harry figured it had something to do with Hermione's Aunt Harmony. The teen did wonder how the family chose names but decided not to worry about it. But Harry had teased Sirius for a few minutes about his constant staring at the woman before the older man threatened to turn him into a ferret in front of Buckbeak. Needless to say, Harry dropped the subject. But it was with a hint of sadness that the holiday ended and the two lovers were back on their way to Hogwarts. But they got quite a surprise when they arrived. Harry and Hermione were just entering the school when a certain Weasley caught up to them.

"Hey. Guys. Um...I...Look. I'm really bad at this stuff so stay with me here. I know I've been a prat for way too long, and I don't expect you to take me back as a friend. I know I ruined that. But...I just want to say...I'm sorry. I'm sorry for being a stupid, jealous prat and trying to use you guys. It took me a while, but I think I finally managed to pull my head out of my arse, kinda like Harry told me to. I hope we can at least be civil again."

Hermione blinked as Harry cocked an eyebrow. Ron simply looked at them, nervous before Hermione spoke.

"Those were big words for you. I don't know about Harry, but I'll take time for me to even consider talking to you, but I accept your apology."

Ron seemed to relax slightly as he looked back to Harry. The teen gave him a level look.

"You can say all you want and try to pretty it up any way you want, but you have to prove what you say."

The red head nodded, grinning widely as he took off into the school, leaving an amused Hermione looked at Harry.

"Talk the Talk, and Walk the Walk?"

Harry nodded.

"Exactly."

-X-X-X-X-X-

The months passed smoothly. January gave way to February and March. April was filled with Easter Holiday and exams were once again upon them. Hermione was in her fevered study stage which was only mellowed by Harry being with her constantly. On his side of things, he and Dumbledore had begun actively searching for the whereabouts of the items Hermione listed since January. The oldman had told him they were getting close to one of them, Slytherin's Locket. So it was on a rather nice day in the first week of June when a simple letter arrived for Harry. Both he and Hermione were studying for their potions final with Slughorn when Fawkes flamed into the room, dropping a scroll onto Harry's lap before flaming out. Both of them looked at the paper that had a single sentence on it.

"It's time."

Harry rose to his feet and grabbed his wand from the table next to him and turned to Hermione. She knew what the note had meant and hugged him tightly.

"You come back to me, understood? Don't play the hero."

Harry pulled back enough to cup her chin in his hand, tilting her face up to his.

"I'll be fine." He whispered before he closed the distance and gave her a short, sweet kiss before heading off with his invisibility cloak in his pocket.

He didn't see Hermione slid down to the floor, hugging her legs as Harry sent out a message to the D.A. members to meet outside Dumbledore's office. When he arrived, he was surprised to find that most of them had shown up. Cedric and Luna stepped forward as did Neville.

"Listen. I don't have much time but here's the situation. Dumbledore and myself are leaving to find an important item. He has intel that tonight will be the night Voldemort makes his move. Squad leaders, you'll be assisting the Order members that will be here. None of you better play the hero. If they tell you to get out of there, you do it. I want you guys to divide up evenly when the Order members arrive and follow their orders. Understood?"

"YES SIR!"

Harry smirked.

"Hop to it." He ordered.

The D.A. split off and headed off to find the Order members while Harry tore up the steps to Dumbledore's office where he found the oldman waiting.

"Harry. I assume you gathered the troops?"

Harry nodded.

"Good. I do hope they are not needed, but I cannot shelter them forever. Now...onto business. Do you still wish to come with me tonight?"

"Yes," said Harry at once.

"Very well, then: listen."

Dumbledore drew himself up to his full height.

"I take you with me on one condition: that you obey any command I might give you at once, and without question."

"Of course."

"Be sure to understand me, Harry. I mean that you must follow even such orders as 'run', 'hide' or 'go back'. Do I have your word?"

"I - yes, of course."

"If I tell you to hide, you will do so?"

"Yes."

"If I tell you to flee, you will obey?"

"Yes."

"If I tell you to leave me, and save yourself, you will do as I tell you?"

"I —"

"Harry?"

They looked at each other for a moment.

"Yes, sir."

Dumbledore smiled.

"Splendid. Now. I have dropped the Ward in this room only for the next few minutes so that we will be able Apparate to our destination. However, we will have to rerun via Hogsmeade. I cannot manipulate the wards outside of the school. You can Apparate, yes?"

Harry nodded.

"Yes, sir. But I don't have a license yet."

Dumbledore smiled.

"Do not worry. I'll assist you again. Are you ready?"

Harry gulped and nodded his head, a rock forming in his gut.

"Place your hand upon my arm, Harry. There is no need to grip too hard, I am merely guiding you. On the count of three — one... two... three..."

Harry turned. At once, there was that horrible sensation that he was being squeezed through a thick rubber tube; he could not draw breath, every part of him was being com-pressed almost past endurance and then, just when he thought he must suffocate, the invisible bands seemed to burst open, and he was standing in cool darkness, breathing in lungfuls of fresh, salty air.

Chapter XII

Frontline

Harry gasped as he and the Headmaster reappeared in Hogsmeade. The young man gave the old wizard a curious look.

"Sir. What you did was stupid. You knew that potion was dangerous, yet you still drank it. Why didn't you just banish it?" He asked as he helped the man stay upright.

"Forgive an old wizard. I assumed that since a summoning charm failed, so would a banishing charm. Sometimes, one over looks the simplest answer to the problem."

Harry snorted.

"Hermione did state that most magicals haven't a shred of logic or common sense."

Dumbledore gave him a half smile.

"Alas, that is true. Now...we must be getting back to the school. By my calculations, the Death Eaters should be inside by now."

"I still say letting them enter the school is a very bad idea." Harry stated, silently summoning the brooms that had been stashed in the village earlier that day.

"True, but I cannot allow young Draco to be left to die." He said as he mounted his broom.

Harry followed suit and the two men kicked off and soared toward the astronomy tower at high speeds. Harry could hear Dumbledore manipulating the wards to allow them entry to the grounds. The broom gave a slight shudder as the entered the boundaries but Harry kept going. He glanced over and had to admit that the headmaster had skills with a broom. They gradually arrived and were greeted by Draco himself. The young Malfoy looked at them nervously as Dumbledore leaned against the wall. Snape appeared just as Harry hide the brooms. Snape took a look at Dumbledore and then to Harry.

"What did he do now?"

"Drank one of Voldemort's potions."

Harry watched the Potion master's eyebrow twitch as he looked over at the Headmaster.

"I don't know weather to be surprised or concerned for your lack of common sense."

"It won't matter for much longer anyway. Severus. Give Harry the items while I catch my breath."

Snape almost palmed his face as he turned to Harry. He reached into his robes and withdrew a rather large vile along with a very thick notebook. Harry eyed them both in curiosity.

"The phial contains all my memories of your father and the rest of the Marauders, including after I joined them with your mother up until the last time I saw Lily and James." He explained, handing Harry the small bottle.

The boy raised an eyebrow.

"You were a marauder?" He asked.

Snape smirked.

"Of course. Who do you think originally helped them become an animagus?"

"But...you and my Dad hated each other!"

"Only until after a month of my almost death. Afterwards, we kept our little alliance a secret. Lily though it was amusing for Sirius to nickname me Batman. Fitting since my animagus form in a bat."

Harry chuckled.

"Always thought you were a bit batty."

Snape frowned.

"James said the same thing after I transformed. As much as I enjoy this little jaunt down memory lane, we only have a few more moments. Now, inside the notebook are our notes on the animagus process. With some skill and a bit of luck, you and Miss Granger will be able to accomplish what we did while at school."

Harry accepted the notebook before he glanced over at Dumbledore.

"Put your cloak on Harry. The time has come." He said softly.

Harry nodded and pulled it out, his eyes filling with tears.

"Sir...for what it's worth...I forgive you."

Dumbledore smiled as a tear slid down into his white beard.

"Thank you, Harry. I'll never forgive myself for what I did to you though. Live long...and prosper." The old man said as he turned to look at Draco.

Harry took his cue and threw the cloak over himself and ducked down behind one of the pillars as Snape took his place next to Draco as the younger man shakily pointed his wand at Dumbledore.

"It is alright, Draco. This way, you and your mother survive."

"It doesn't make this right." He muttered.

Dumbledore opened his mouth to respond only to close it as several Death Eaters arrived in the tower. A lumpy-looking man with an odd lopsided leer gave a wheezy giggle.

"Dumbledore cornered!" he said, and he turned to a stocky little woman who looked as though she could be his sister and who was grinning eagerly. "Dumbledore wandless, Dumbledore alone! Well done, Draco, well done!"

"Good evening, Amycus," said Dumbledore calmly, as though welcoming the man to a tea party. "And you've brought Alecto too... charming..."

The woman gave an angry little titter.

"Think your little jokes'll help you on your death bed, then?" she jeered.

"Jokes? No, no, these are manners," replied Dumbledore.

"Do it," said the stranger standing nearest to Harry, a big, rangy man with matted grey hair and whiskers, whose black Death Eater's robes looked uncomfortably tight. He had a voice like none that Harry had ever heard: a rasping bark of a voice. Harry could smell a powerful mixture of dirt, sweat and, unmistakably, of blood coming from him. His filthy hands had long yellowish nails.

"Is that you, Fenrir?" asked Dumbledore.

"That's right," rasped the other. "Pleased to see me, Dumbledore?"

"No, I cannot say that I am..."

Fenrir Greyback grinned, showing pointed teeth. Blood trickled down his chin and he licked his lips slowly, obscenely.

"But you know how much I like kids, Dumbledore."

"Am I to take it that you are attacking even without the full moon now? This is most unusual... you have developed a taste for human flesh that cannot be satisfied once a month?"

"That's right," said Greyback. "Shocks you, does it, Dumbledore? Frightens you?"

"Well, I cannot pretend it does not disgust me a little, Actually, it makes me rather sick to my stomach to be perfectly honest." Dumbledore stated. "And, yes, I am a little shocked that Draco here invited you, of all people, into the school where his friends live..."

"I didn't," breathed Malfoy. He was not looking at Greyback; he did not seem to want to even glance at him. "I didn't know he was going to come —"

"I wouldn't want to miss a trip to Hogwarts, Dumbledore," rasped Greyback. "Not when there are throats to be ripped out... delicious, delicious..."

And he raised a yellow fingernail and picked at his front teeth, leering at Dumbledore.

"I could do you for afters, Dumbledore..."

"You could try. But ultimately fail." The oldman responded calmly.

Fenrir snarled and started forward, only to be blocked by a Death Eater.

"No," said the fourth Death Eater sharply. "We've got orders. Draco's got to do it. Now, Draco, and quickly."

Dumbledore was struggling to remain up right as the potions effects tore through his system,.

"He's not long for this world anyway, if you ask me!" said the lopsided man, to the accompaniment of his sister's wheezing giggles. "Look at him — what's happened to you, then, Dumby?"

"Oh, weaker resistance, slower reflexes, Amycus," said Dumbledore. "Old age, in short... one day, perhaps, it will happen to you... if you are lucky..."

"What's that mean, then, what's that mean?" yelled the Death Eater, suddenly violent.

"Apparently, your slow brain is unable to comprehend how to articulate the statement I just spoke, once again showing your lack of intelligence."

Harry fought hard not to laugh at the confused look on the man's face. He had to admit, this was one hell of a way to leave the world.

"Always the same, weren't yeh, Dumby, talking and doing nothing, nothing, I don't even

know why the Dark Lord's bothering to kill yeh! Come on, Draco, do it!"

At that precise moment, the door to the ramparts burst open once more and there stood Snape, his wand clutched in his hand as his black eyes swept the scene, from Dumbledore slumped against the

wall, to the four Death Eaters, including the enraged werewolf, and Malfoy.

"We've got a problem, Snape," said the lumpy Amycus, whose eyes and wand were fixed alike upon Dumbledore, "the boy doesn't seem able —"

But somebody else had spoken Snape's name, quite softly.

"Severus..."

Snape said nothing, but walked forwards and pushed Malfoy roughly out of the way. The three Death Eaters fell back without a word. Even the werewolf seemed cowed.

Snape gazed for a moment at Dumbledore, and there was revulsion and hatred etched in the harsh lines of his face. Harry knew that this was killing Snape to do, but he'd sworn on his magic he'd do it.

"Severus... please..."

Snape raised his wand and pointed it directly at Dumbledore.

"Avada Kedavra!"

A jet of green light shot from the end of Snape's wand and hit Dumbledore squarely in the chest. Dumbledore was blasted into the air: for a split second he seemed to hang suspended beneath the shining skull, and then he fell slowly backwards, like a great rag doll, over the battlements and out of sight.

-X-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry finished packing his trunk with his belongs and was just sitting on his bed, staring out the window. It seemed like such a beautiful day, yet the funeral had only ended an hour ago.

"Harry?"

Said Potter looked over to the stairs to see Hermione still in her funeral dress standing in the doorway. He gave her a half smile and patted the bed beside him. She made her way over to him and

lowered herself next to him and leaned her head on his shoulder. Harry wrapped his arm around her and held her close.

"We've got a long journey ahead of us. I don't even know where to begin." Harry admitted.

"Well...Bill and Fleur are getting married so we have to go to that. Afterwards...well...We do know what the remaining Horcruxes are so it's only a matter of tracking them down."

"Which could take years. Why do I like I'm going in blind?"

"Because we usually do." She answered.

Harry mock glared at her.

"Smart arse."

She smiled at him.

"Love you too. Let's finish up packing and head downstairs. We still have to get your aunt and uncle to safety."

Harry snorted.

"I can picture Vernon's reply 'You just want the house for yourself!'" He imitated his over bearing uncle.

Hermione giggled and pulled him to his feet before engulfing him into a hug.

"We'll get through this Harry. You and me Harry. Always and forever." She spoke softly into his chest.

Harry smiled warmly and returned her embrace, enjoying these few moments of peace.

-X-X-X-X-X-

The train ride back was going smoothly for everyone. Luna was reading her Quibbler upside down, intent on finding a hidden image that Harry had a suspicion didn't exist, Neville stepped out to use the loo, and Harry and Hermione were enjoying a game of checkers.

Quite suddenly, the door opened and Ron hurriedly stepped into the compartment and got a curious look from all the occupants. Granted, he had changed for the better over the last several months, but he was still a long way from being included as a close friend.

"Mind if I sit in here for a few minutes?" He asked nervously.

Harry gestured to the open seat and Ron dropped into it, sighing in relief. The door opened again, this time, in stepped Neville who looked like he was trying not to laugh. Harry raised an eyebrow at the boy.

"Lavender Brown is going up and down the train looking for a 'Won-Won'. Wouldn't happen to know who she's looking for, would you Ron?" He asked, grinning at the red head.

Ron groaned and put his head in his hands. Harry managed not to laugh at the Weasley.

"She calls you 'Won-Won'? What do you call her? 'Lav-Lav'?" Harry questioned.

"Hmm...It doesn't seem like it would work for every name. For example. I could call Neville 'Nev-Nev' and it is acceptable." Luna said, giving the older boy a sly grin.

"Yeah, but 'Lun-Lun' sounds too weird. Besides, I think Luna is fine just the way it is." Neville said, smirking.

Harry grinned before he turned to Hermione who had a mischievous look on her face.

"You call me 'Har-Har' and we're going to have problems." He said seriously.

The rest of the occupants laughed at this as they continued on their way to London.

-x-x-x-x-x-

The Boy-Who-Lived looked at his only living relatives as they prepared to leave the house for the time being. True enough to Harry's prediction, Vernon had spouted out something along the

lines that Harry just wanted the house to himself. The explanation Harry had given, yet again, at a volume Vernon would understand, meaning he screamed at the man till he was red in the face, set things right. Dudley and Petunia both felt it would be wise to leave with the order. But what happened next shocked him. Dudley moved forward, hand outstretched, looking Harry in the eye, something he hadn't been able to do since before Harry started Hogwarts.

"Good luck, Harry. When you finish that crazy off, send me a letter and we'll meet up so you can tell me about it."

Harry grasped Dudley's hand.

"You sure, Dudley? You hate magic, remember?"

Dudley grinned.

"Not if your using it. Seems to me, if your fighting this hard to keep us safe, then you're a good guy in my book. And family. Family cares about each other, even though I didn't show it, I was always a bit worried about you, cousin."

Harry gave Dudley a grin that the other boy returned.

"You know what, Dudley? I'll take you up on that offer."

They let their hands drop and Dudley walked back over to his mother and glanced back at Harry.

"Kick Voldemort's arse Harry. Then settle down with that girl of yours."

Harry's grin widened even further.

"You got it, Big D. I'll owl you when I finish this and we'll go have a few drinks."

"I'll hold you to that."

Dudley walked over to Hesita Jones and followed her out to the car while Petunia gave Harry a sad look.

"Harry. I...I'm sorry. I let my fear of m-magic move to you. You never once showed any intent to harm us. It...it was easier to hate you, than to face my fears. I'm sorry. Your mother would be ashamed of me." She began to sob.

Harry didn't know what came over him, maybe it was because of Dudley, but Harry found himself placing a hand on his Aunt's shoulder. She flinched slightly, but stayed where she was, looking right at him.

"I can't say I'll ever be able to forgive you, but your all my family and as Dudley put it, we care about each other."

Petunia gave him a small, watery smile as she ruffled his hair, almost laughing at the look on his face at the action.

"When you write Dudley, send a letter my way. I'd like a chance to start over. If that is alright with you?"

Harry paused and smiled.

"Sounds good."

"And bring this Hermione your so fond of. If your anything like James, you snagged the brightest girl in your age group."

Harry smirked as his Aunt left leaving Vernon and Harry. Both men eyed each other before Vernon stuck out his hand, his face neutral. Harry grasped his Uncle's outstretched hand.

"Well...this is it then. You take care of this nutter. And...drop us a line someday. I'd...well...that is...we'd like to know that you survived. Family cares, you know." He muttered stiffly.

Harry nodded his head, releasing his Uncle's hand.

"I do indeed, Uncle Vernon. Otherwise I wouldn't be trying to get you all to safety."

"You've grown into a decent man, Harry. Good luck."

With that, Vernon followed Dedalus Diggle out to the car. Harry watched them head off and around the corner, wondering if he would indeed see them again.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry screamed in rage as a Death Eater almost hit Hedwig as she took flight. Harry was tired of playing kid games as he took aim at the Death Eater who was trying to kill him.

"REDUCTO!" He roared, sending the red jet at the Death Eater.

The curse smashed into his chest, right about where the heart was and exited out the back. The body slid and fell off the broom, but before it fell more than a few feet, it burst into flames. Harry looked back up and saw two more fall in behind him and Hagrid. He sent another curse at them, but they managed to dodge it, sending another green jet at his head.

"Must go faster! Must go faster!" He screamed as he sent a cutting curse at the Death Eater closest to him, watching it catch him in the stomach.

He fell behind, but his buddy seemed intent on killing him. The Death Eater fired another killing curse, but this time, his aim was true. It shot right at Harry and he knew he wouldn't be able to dodge this one but a blur of white and a loud screech caught his attention. His eyes widened when he realized just who had taken the curse for him.

"HEDWIG! NO!"

The owl fell toward the earth, limp and unmoving. Harry snapped his gaze back to the Death Eater, rage filling his very being. He had just watched one of his oldest friends killed. No more would die because of him. Harry rose to on his seat, keeping himself steady through magic. Using every ounce of strength he had, he leapt off the bike and smashed into the Death Eater, who hadn't counted on this, and both fell toward the earth. Harry took aim and fired his curse.

"AVADA KEDAVRA!"

The jet of green soared from his wand and impacted into the chest of the Death Eater, killing him. Harry grabbed the broom, noting it was a Nimbus 2001. He mounted it and took off, wand ready.

"COME AND GET ME YOU SONOFVABICHTH! YOU'VE MANAGED TO KILL JUST ABOUT EVERYONE ELSE. YOU'VE TRIED TO KILL ME FOUR TIMES, BUT LIKE A POOR MARKSMAN, YOU KEEP MISSING THE TARGET! I'M LAUGHING AT YOUR SUPEIOR SKILLS!" Harry screamed to the sky.

Somewhere, he heard someone shout that it was him. He looked over and saw Voldemort come at him, no broom in sight. Harry screamed at him and put the broom on a collision course for him, sending curses at the evil vile bastard.

"COME ON! COME ON YOU SONOFVABITCH! I'M RIGHT HERE!"

Voldemort sneered as he prepared to curse Harry, but both of their wands snapped up and a golden beam lanced between them, connecting them. Harry watched the surprised look of Tom's face as his wand shattered. Harry gained a predatory grin as he beared down on Voldemort, wand ready to fire when he felt himself lifted off the broom. He looked around and saw Hagrid, face contorted in concentration as he smashed the little button and the bike lurched forward and veered away from them. Harry prepared to continue fighting , but it wasn't needed as the ground was approaching.

"ANG ON HARRY! WE'RE COMIN' IN."

Harry gripped the sides of the sidecar as they made a bone jarring landing. Hagrid stopped the bike and gave Harry a grin.

"That wasn't so bad."

"Speak for yourself." Harry muttered as he got out of the sidecar.

Hagrid stepped off the bike and looked around before giving Harry a confused look.

"Harry, where's Hedwig?"

"She . . . she got hit."

Hagrid gave him an understanding look.

"She had a great old life. Now come mere. We have to get ye to the Burrow. Portkey is over here."

Harry and Hagrid grabbed the hairbrush and felt the yank of it's activation and found themselves at the Burrow. Harry rose back to his feet and saw Mrs. Weasley and Ginny rushing over to them. After a moment of panic Harry learned that they were supposed to be third, but were the first. The arrival of Remus and George calmed them somewhat even after Harry was interrogated about if he was real. George had a decent cut along his right cheek from Snape, but Remus had seen who the original target had been, and managed to pull the other man back to avoid losing an ear. As is, only a slight scar on his cheek would be his souvenir. Harry, meanwhile, was staring out the window of the kitchen, waiting for one person in particular to arrive. He caught sight of a mass of brown bushy hair and bolted to the door, but was stopped by the wand of Kingsley. Harry drew his as Lupin and everyone else did the same, pointing it at Kingsley's chest.

"What did Sirius tell you the night Voldemort came back?" He asked Harry.

"Keep your head down for now, pup. When the time comes, we'll beat him."

Kingsley nodded and after a quick check with Remus and Shack, they let Harry by. He took two steps and found himself holding a sobbing Hermione. The others moved into the kitchen, leaving them out in the garden.

"It's alright. We're safe."

"I know. I was just so scared I'd lose you when I saw all the Death Eaters. And then when Voldemort showed up..."

Harry held her tightly as the next group arrived, Mr. Weasley and Fred followed by Bill and Fleur. And Tonks and an unconscious Ron. After a moment, Mad Eye showed up alone, looking grave. He walked pasted the two and into the house leaving Harry to feel his gut clench.

"Let's head inside."

Hermione nodded and followed him inside and they joined the rest of the crew. Remus looked up at them and gestured to the open spots at the table.

"We have a casualty report. Mundugus Fletcher is dead. Two timing git is the one who set us up. Tried to curse Mad Eye, but got hit by a killing curse." Remus told them.

Harry nodded and took Hermione's hand

"What about Ron?"

"Stunner." Tonks spoke. "After he caught Malfoy senior with his, Nott got him."

They spoke for a few minutes before they were dismissed, and Harry pulled Hermione outside again and they headed for the garden. He let her hand go as he walked to the edge of the garden and sighed heavily.

"This is just going to get harder."

Hermione walked up behind him and snaked her arms around his torso.

"We'll beat him, Harry."

The dark haired teen turned around and held her close, breathing in the scent of vanilla.

"That we will. That we will."

-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry looked around the dance floor as everyone enjoyed themselves at the reception. He had to admit, it had been a beautiful ceremony. He looked over at the newlyweds and felt that this was what made the whole fight worth it. People falling in love and starting families and just living life to the fullest. Harry had been looking around so intently that he hadn't noticed a certain red haired female plop down next to him.

"Harry?"

Said boy turned to see Ginny Weasley sitting across from him. He kept his face neutral as he responded.

"Ginny. What do you need?"

Ginny looked down at the table, unable to maintain eye contact.

"I just wanted to say, I'm sorry for what I did. The doctors said that I was borderline obsessive and that it was doing me more harm than good."

Harry gave a mental snort. Borderline. Right.

"I'm already over that. However, I think Hermione might still be angry since you pretty much killed me. Now, why don't you go and see what your aunt wants. She seems intent on coming over to you."

Ginny looked over and sure enough, her Aunt was beckoning her over. The red head nodded and sulked over to her over bearing Aunt. Harry went back to watching the dance floor and saw something that put him on edge. Victor Krum was making his way over to Hermione. Harry didn't like this one bit, so he decided to head the larger man off. He didn't make it all the way over before Victor caught up to her.

"Her-my-oninny."

Harry wanted to laugh at the pronunciation of her name but decided against it as he wondered what the Bulgarian wanted.

"Yes?" Hermione responded.

"I vos vondering. Can I have a vord?"

Hermione looked at him skeptically but nodded.

"Sure. What can I do for you?"

Victor seemed to take courage from this and stood a bit taller.

"Why are you with Potter?"

Hermione blinked in confusion before she frowned.

"Why do you care?"

Victor either didn't care about the icy sound of her voice, or he truly was thick as he continued.

"He is just a little boy. He does not know how to handle such a beautiful woman. He does not deserve such a beautiful woman."

Hermione placed her hands on her hips and glared at Victor. Harry saw the signs of an impending blow up and tried to get to Hermione before Victor was cursed into a slug.

"Really? And you do?"

Victor shrugged.

"Of course. Only a real man can satisfy you. I just happen to be that man."

"Bit of a thick git, aren't you?" Harry asked as he stepped between Hermione and Victor.

The older boy narrowed his eyes at Harry.

"This does not concern you. I was speaking to Her-my-oninny."

"Hermione is my fiancée. And by the looks of it, she doesn't want to speak with you. So, if you'll excuse us, we'll be going now." Harry stated as he turned to speak to Hermione.

Victor, however, wasn't done. He grabbed Harry by the arm and spun him back to face him.

"I was not through with you, little boy."

Harry's hand was just beginning to dive for his wand when several gasps got his attention. He and Hermione looked back to the center of the dance floor to see a silver lynx standing there. It opened its

mouth and Kingsley's deep voice spoke the seven words everyone would remember forever.

"The ministry has fallen. He is coming."

Harry yanked his arm out of Krum's hand and grabbed Hermione's, both heading for the apparition point when several dozen pops were heard. Harry didn't look back as several screams went out and a few multi colored jets flew past his head.

"HANG ON!" He screamed to Hermione as he spun on the spot.

The pair vanished into the air, several choice curse words were uttered.

-X-X-X-X-X-

The two popped into existence just on the doorstep of Sirius's house. Harry quickly pulled her inside and was greeted by Kreacher.

"Good evening. Master Sirius is out on errands, but should be back soon. Kreacher does wish Master had given him a warning that Harry Potter and Miss Granger were coming."

Harry gave the elf a small smile.

"Sorry. We kinda had to make a break for it from the wedding. That's why we're here."

Kreacher nodded and escorted the two to the second floor to their bedroom. When Hermione asked why they were sharing, Kreacher responded.

"Master said that the love birds should bunk together since they'd end up in the same bed anyway."

The two teens blushed and thanked the elf before closing the door behind them. One thing was certain though. Voldemort was now in control of Britain. And things were only going to get worse.

Chapter XIII

We Will Fight...

Sirius appeared in the kitchen of Black Manor, looking grim as he placed the paper on the table. He looked behind him to see Kreacher walking toward him. The old elf gave a short bow before speaking.

"Master's Godson and his mate are upstairs napping."

"Could you wake them and have them meet me down here?" He asked the elf.

Kreacher nodded and shuffled back out of the room. Sirius dropped into his chair and was greeted by silence for several minutes before his godson entered the room followed by his girlfriend. The look on his face told them it was serious.

"What's wrong, Sirius?" Harry asked as he sat down at the table, quickly followed by Hermione.

The momentary pause filled Harry with unease.

"Mad eye is dead. His Death Eaters used a trap by making those suspected of being in the order that their master had taken over. Kingsley reacted just as they suspected. Mad eye intervened in the fight that was being conducted and took on two dozen Death Eaters by himself to buy them both time to escape. Problem is, Arthur is being suspected and under surveillance along with a few other members."

Hermione had a hand over her mother in horror as Harry's gaze hardened.

"What do we do now?"

"No one knows. Every since Albus died, we haven't had a clear leader. We're kinda just...drifting around. In a daze if you will."

Harry looked away from Sirius and seemed to stare off into space as Hermione voiced her own concerns.

"Where's Tonks and Kingsley now?" She asked.

"Nym is with Mooney. And Shack is staying low in a safe house of his own. Both are safe."

"Sirius? What do you know about Horcrux?" Harry asked, causing the man to pale.

"Enough to know the costs. It was mentioned in rather gruesome detail in a book in the family library. Why?" He asked uneasily.

Harry looked to Hermione who nodded, albeit hesitantly, before he looked to Sirius with determination on his face.

"Gather everyone here for a meeting in two days. We've got a war to fight and I doubt we'll get any victory if we just...drift around."

-X-X-X-X-X-X-

Two days later saw every surviving member of the Order gathered at Grimmauld Place with a bit of confusion. The low buzz of conversation ended as Harry entered the room. Mrs. Weasley immediately tried to get Harry and Hermione to leave.

"Harry, dear. I think you should go back upstairs. I'll make you something better than what you've been eating."

And then, to everyone's surprise, he pushed her away from him with his wand pointed at her.

"Back off of me. First. I'm an adult. You will respect that. Two, I will not be eating anything you make since it always seems to be dosed in love potion. Three, I called this meeting. Now, sit down and be quiet or I'll obliviate you and send you on your way." He told her, his tone indicating he wasn't kidding.

Molly, either oblivious or just crazy, protested.

"Really now! You have no basis for your accusations! And your still too young to even be thinking about fighting."

Harry looked at her before he dropped his robes and showed his attire. The best way to describe it was as a battle uniform. It was

black with scrolls attached to it along with knives and, to everyone's surprise, Gryffindor's sword tied to his waist.

"I've been fighting since I was one. I've fought Voldemort four times and walked away from them each time. I have more right than you to be heard. Now sit down or I'll make you."

Molly opened her mouth to speak but was silenced by Arthur, who fixed his wife with a glare that seemed to surprise her. He turned back to Harry and nodded. The young man walked to the front of the room and crossed his arms as he looked at the assembled witches and wizards.

"Alright. To start with, who here knows what a Horcrux is?"

Half the table registered shock and seemed to pale at the thought. Others seemed confused, namely the younger ones.

"I see some of you do. Fine, allow me to explain it. A Horcrux is an object in which a dark wizard or witch hides a fragment of their own soul for the purpose of immortality. It is considered the darkest and most foul of magic as it violates the laws of nature and morality. It requires the act of murder to accomplish its creation. The first one ever created was by Herpo the Foul, who was the first breeder of the Basilisk."

The table was silent as everyone took time to digest the information before Remus asked the question everyone was wondering.

"What has this have to do with us? It's not like Voldemort...created...oh no."

A look of understanding crossed everyone's face as Harry nodded.

"And that is not the only thing. He created multiple. We actually have already destroyed three of them. The diary that controlled Ginny Weasley and a ring belonging to Mr. Riddle's grandfather."

Sirius cocked his head in confusion.

"You said three were destroyed. What was the other one?"

Harry looked him in the eye.

"Me. Ginny's unintentional poisoning of myself forced that one to take over my body. I had, in essence, died. I came back and forced it out of my body and Albus and Hermione destroyed it."

The room was silent as everyone looked at the boy in shock as he took a breathe before continuing.

"My mission was to find and destroy these things. However, it has come to my attention that the Order is...drifting. That cannot be allowed. I, Harry James Potter, have decided to step up and lead us through this fight."

"You can't! You only a boy! If you die, what of Ginny?" Molly blurted out.

Harry didn't raise his wand as he sent a stunner at Molly, who slumped to the floor.

"She is no longer allowed at these meetings. She only wants me with Ginny. Her mind is clouded and will only bring us danger."

Arthur looked at his wife's unconscious form with disappointment as Harry continued.

"Alright. Now we need to keep all of our heads down. Shack and Tonks are safe, but I don't want anymore of our numbers forced into the open."

Everyone nodded their understanding.

"Next, our rules of engagement. Now, stunning is alright when you have the greater numbers or when it's one on one. But we cannot and will not win this war by fighting like school kids. The time for stunners is past. Your arsenal will include all offensive combat spells. Hell, even the Unforgivables is good to use."

Several mouths opened in shock, but it was Sirius who spoke up.

"Harry. That will make us no better than the Death Eaters. Albus saw that."

Harry looked right at his godfather.

"And look at how good it worked out. You can't win a war if you leave the enemy that is still able to fight. Put a reducto through their chest and their buddies can't revive them. I know for a fact that last June, I had to stun the same Death Eater over a dozen times over. And, will you use these spells to terrorize innocents and kill them?"

Everyone shook their heads and Harry nodded in satisfaction.

"We need to expand our range of attacks. Now, as for the Horcrux. The last remaining ones are Hufflepuffs cup, Ravenclaws Diadem, and an unknown object. We destroy those before we hit Riddle. We will base ourselves out of here. I will have Remus setup a new fidelius charm with myself as the secret keeper. You all will receive the information at a later date. Before I dismiss everyone, I'd like to also say something. Many of you, I know, will feel awkward taking orders from a man who just turned seventeen. I would, but we can't let it now. I plan to win. Anyone who won't follow me, you can take your own actions as you see fit. You have until the next meeting."

-X-X-X-X-X-X-

"Hey pup. Got a minute?"

Harry looked over at the door to see Sirius poking his head into the door. The teen gestured for him to enter, which the old marauder entered and plopped down in the chair by the bed, looking at Harry seriously.

"You said some pretty harsh things tonight. I just wanted to let you know, that no matter what, I'll be behind you, one hundred percent."

Harry gave him a grateful smile.

"Thanks. I know that when I brought up killing the enemy, quite a few of them didn't like that."

Sirius nodded and settled into the chair a little better.

"Yeah. The ones that understood where you were coming from are the old crowd. The younger ones are so enamored by the light side, they forget about the grey. During the first war, all of us were grey. We learned fast that just stunning and disarming wouldn't do the

trick. Of course, I was an Auror at the time with your Dad and Mooney. Hell, we worked right under ol' Mad eye himself." Sirius seemed to grow distant as he reflected on the past.

Harry waited for the older man to continue.

"First thing he taught us, was that you don't win wars by playing the good guy. Because everyone has to be the bad guy to win. It only matters for what side you start from. Your not a light sider, Harry. And your not dark. You've found that in between place where the lines are blurred. It's just remembering what your fighting for that will tell how things pan out."

The teen nodded and looked over at his own, currently asleep.

"I understand that. It's just that this is going to be a very long fight for all of us. I don't want one of us going down from getting shot in the back by some Death Eater that was already knocked down."

Sirius understood him and sighed.

"Yeah. I remember the first time we learned that. We were executing a raid on a suspected Death Eater Hideout..."

FLASHBACK

Sirius stood with James and Remus by the meeting point with Moody. The young Black looked over to his friends to see the grim determination on their faces as their Squad Leader walked over to them. Sirius stood a little straighter as their mentor stopped in front of them.

"Alright. Word is a few of Voldemort's men are hold up inside with hostages. Three muggles and two magicals. Muggles are identified as Mr. and Mrs. Thompson and their young muggleborn daughter. The Magicals have been identified as Edward Von Schlegel, the German Ministry representative and his guide, Danielle Engleman from our Ministry." He informed them.

"What's our game plan, sir?" James asked.

"Simple. Squad Alpha under Bones will come in through the west side. Squad Bravo under Scrimmour will come in from the south.

We're Delta Squad, so we get the north side. The east side is being covered by snipers from the Unspeakables. When go in, make our way to the third floor, take out the enemy presence, secure the hostages, and get them to safety. Any questions?"

"Sir. What will Alpha and Bravo be doing while we retrieve the hostages?" Remus asked.

"Their going to be securing the rest of the compound and also act as an escort for our exfiltration. We've got two minutes to get into position."

Sirius double checked his armor and followed the others up to the door. Moody used simple hand gestures to signal them to stack up behind him. Sirius took the rear position and waited as Moody held his hand up. After a few seconds ticked by, Moody motioned his hand forward, signaling James to move forward to open the door. Open, however, barely described it as the door when flying into the building and smashing into the opposite wall Moody rushed into the opening, sending silent stunners into the dazed and confused Death Eaters. James entered, followed by Remus and lastly Sirius. Both Remus and Sirius scanned the upper levels in a three hundred and sixty degree arc, making sure no one was in a position to flank them. Satisfied, they turned their attention back onto what was happening in front of them. Moody motioned forward. James took position to his right, a meter behind him with Remus and Sirius bringing up the rear. They passed the other squads as they moved to the stairs. James and Remus took position on either side of the stairs so that Moody and Sirius could have cover up the stairs. Both men hurried up the steps, coming up to the next floor and immediately coming up against resistance. Sirius caught a Death Eater with a stunner, while Moody hit another with a full Body-Bind curse. They were joined by James and Remus as Bravo squad began to make their way to this level. Sirius didn't pay them any attention, only his own job. He followed the others in his squad as they made their way up to the third level where they encountered heavy resistance in the form of six Death Eaters firing killing curses at them, blasting holes in the wall near them.

"DMLE! DROP YOU WANDS!" James roared.

"HA! YOU WISH LAWMAN! JUST TRY AND MAKE US!" A green jet of light signified they wanted a fight.

Sirius rolled into the opening, flat against the ground and sent four quick stunners and a bludgeoning hex in quick succession before he rolled himself back into cover. Remus sent in a few cutting curses along with a disarming hex, while James sent in a pair of reductos and even a blinding hex. Moody was busy screaming from Alpha to bring in support.

"YOU'LL NEVER SAVE THEM ALL! THE LONGER YOU WAIT, THE MORE WILL DIE!"

Sirius glanced at Moody, who nodded. All four moved quickly, bursting into the room and firing off stunners at the Death Eaters. Sirius felt a bone breaking curse hit him in the ribs, shattering them. He grunted in pain and caught the bastard who cursed him with a full body bind while the rest were subdued. It took them less than a minute to take them all out.

"Alright. Let's get these hostages out of here! Potter! Lupin! Your on point! Black, your with me on rear. Let's move people!"

They gathered up the hostages and hurried from the room, joined by Alpha as they hurried down the stairs to the first floor where Bravo was dragging the last of the Death Eaters out to be gathered up for incarceration. Sirius felt himself relax as they passed over the threshold and immediately regretted it as one of the upper level Death Eaters that Sirius had personally cursed fired off a cutting curse at them. Sirius spun around, dropping to one knee to stabilize himself and sent a return curse that smashed into the targets face. A reducto that went through his face and out the back of his head. A grunt sounded to his left and upon looking in that direction, he saw Moody trying to stand as blood poured out of the back of his leg. It had been a lucky shot that hit in in the back of the knee. Sirius quickly moved to him and helped the senior Auror up and together to the medical team waiting on them. Sirius looked back at the compound as they others were checked over and felt the impact of what had just happened. He'd just killed a man. A man who had been subdued not even five minutes ago. One who, if he understood correctly, could have killed his Squad Leader. The young man look down at his hands. This wasn't how it was supposed to happen. Only the bad guys killed. The good guys never took a life. As if senseing what was going through his mind, Moody placed a hand on

his shoulder, causing Sirius to look at him. The older man looked at him with understanding.

"It's not easy. Taking a life. We think that the good guy always gets away with out any blood on his hands. But it's bull shit. In war, you can't win it if you play the good guy. Because all of us have to be the bad guy to win. It doesn't matter what side you belong to. It's what your intentions are. You did the right thing Black. You saved my life and you ride the world of one less Death Eater. That will count for a bit more peace in the world."

Sirius nodded and felt drained.

"I understand, but it really doesn't make me feel any better."

Moody limped away to check on the others. He stopped a few feet away from Sirius and spoke over his shoulder.

"It wasn't meant to make you able to sleep or deal with your views on killing. It was meant to explain that we can't fight these bastards like students in fourth year. There is nothing preventing them from killing us. As a famous muggle once said, 'War is cruelty. There is no use trying to reform it. The crueller it is, the sooner it will be over.' We fight back with all we have and we'll end this sooner rather than later. I don't know about you, but that is why I do this job. The meaner and crueller I am to the enemy will mean that it's closer to ending this war."

Sirius watched him walk away and looked back at his hands before he looked back up with new determination and had a grim smile on his face.

"Well then. Cry havoc and let slip the dogs of war."

END FLASHBACK

"After that, we took what ever means needed to bring them to justice. We rationalized it as the fact that they were usually executed when they were brought in anyway. Crouch was a ruthless as a Death Eater when it came to punishments. We were authorized to use the Unforgivables. Most of only used them when the situation deemed them necessary. Escalation of force it was called. But we knew what

was needed. This new generation grew up in peace and don't know how to fight a war."

Harry sighed and looked out the window into the night sky.

"That's why I need the older generation. To explain this to those who don't understand. I know all this and so does Hermione. I don't plan on stopping my fight until Voldemort and his cronies are finished off."

Sirius nodded and rose from his seat, stretching before he headed to the door. He paused at the door frame and looked back at Harry.

"There is another saying I've heard from Churchill that pretty much describes how we fit into protecting the innocents. 'We sleep soundly in our beds because rough men stand ready to visit violence on those who would harm us.' We're doing good, Harry, in the long run. Remember that pup. We'll talk more later. Good night."

Harry watched the door closed and plopped back on the bed wondering just what his next step was going to be.

-X-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry finished up his battle scroll and tucked it into his uniform as Hermione entered the room. She walked over to him and wrapped her arms around him. Harry sighed and leaned back, enjoying the feeling of her warmth.

"What are the scrolls for?" She asked.

Harry didn't even open his eyes as he answered.

"Battle scrolls. They contain summoning magic. A burst of magic into them and I can summon anything from a stone golem to a more ferocious Cerberus. In theory. The information Godric wrote down is a bit vague. Something about having to earn the summons respect before I can actually use them."

Hermione seemed lost in thought as she went back over the information of the founders. Specifically, Gryffindor. Godric was said to have been one of the few battle mages who used very complicated forms of magic, including summons and wandless

magic. He was an accomplished swordsman and was said to have been a hurricane on the battlefield. Most of his techniques haven't been able to be recreated even to this day. She herself was working on a few of Rowena's more complicated illusion magic, such as completely immersing her enemies in an illusion that would be as real to them as the real world.

"You studying to be a battle mage?" She asked.

Harry gave a half hearted shrug.

"I don't know what I'm becoming. I just want every edge possible in this fight. If summing a three headed stone dog or something like that confuse Voldemort as much as it'll confuse me about the weird merging of the summons, than that's fine by me. Who knows? Maybe it'll step on him or something."

Hermione giggled as she stood up. Harry would have protested, but her hands sudden pressing on his back silenced him. Harry gave a groan as he leaned forward, letting her hands knead and massage the tight muscles of his back away. He could feel himself melt under her touch, enjoying the sensations.

"That feels really good." He muttered as she worked her way up his back to his shoulders.

"I'm glad. These hands aren't only good for school work, Mr. Potter."

"I never realized that. Though with all that page turning, it's not a surprise at how well they seem to work."

Hermione silenced him as she moved to his neck. As she worked closer to the base of his skull, she leaned in to his ear.

"And I get one next."

"M'kay." He muttered.

Hermione smirked.

"Did I also mention that I want a full body massage. Minus the clothes?"

Harry took a second to register what she had just said. When he did, his eyes shot open and his head snapped around.

"Clothes. Gone. Bed. Now. Massage is coming."

Giggles could be heard followed by a sudden silence, making Kreacher back away from the door as quickly as his old body could. Perhaps he'd just wait for them to come down stairs. They seemed...preoccupied.

-X-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry and Hermione emerged from the bed room an hour and a half later and headed down to the kitchen for dinner when they came across Kreacher. The elf was holding a locket in his hands and was looking at Harry with hope.

"Kreacher overheard that Harry Potter is destroying Dark Lords soul anchors."

Harry nodded, lowering down to Kreacher's level.

"That's right. Do you know of one?"

Kreacher nodded and handed Harry the locket.

"Master Regulas stole this from Dark Lord. Ordered Kreacher to destroy it. But Kreacher hasn't been able to."

Harry looked at the locket, his gaze hardened. He opened his hand to Kreacher, who hesitantly dropped it into Harry's open palm. The teen closed his eyes and felt a throb from the locket, almost like a heart. He opened his eyes and gave Kreacher a kind smile.

"Thank you, Kreacher. I'll see to it that this abomination is destroyed."

Kreacher seemed to tear up and thanked Harry before he sped off to finish dinner. Harry gripped the locket in his hand and headed into the kitchen where Sirius was reading the paper. He looked over at Harry and saw the expression on his face.

"What is it?" He asked, setting the paper down.

Harry didn't even pause.

"Assemble the order. We've got a Horcrux."

-X-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry entered into the kitchen, seeing that everyone was present, which pleased him. He walked to the front of the table and dropped the locket on the table. He noticed several stares of confusion on their faces and decided that the direct approach was the best option.

"What you see before you is Salazar Slytherin's locket. It contains a fragment of Tom Riddle's soul."

Several gasps were heard as everyone looked at the locket fearfully. Harry continued.

"I brought you all here to witness it's destruction. This way, you know exactly what we are dealing with."

Harry didn't wait for a response before he opened the locket with a bit of difficulty. Inside, he could see an eye staring back at him. Harry glared at it with pure hatred and pulled Gryffindor's sword out and raised it, ready to destroy it as a voice, silky smooth, issued from it.

"Forsaken by fate. Loved by no one. Orphaned and despised by those called family. I see your fears, Harry Potter. Your heart has fear...Yes...fear of betrayal. Betrayal by mentors...friends...lovers...yes, that is your deepest fear. To lose you love to the betrayer..."

To Harry's horror, two figures appeared from the locket. Ghostly images of Hermione and Ron. His eyes looked on the image of Hermione. She looked more beautiful and more seductive than the real one. He watched as she embraced Ron in a kiss that was definitely approaching adult only. The image looked back at him and sneered, her voice the same, yet different.

"Harry Potter. The Boy Who Lived. Why on earth would I be with some one who is a target. Who must always put those around him in

danger. Who I've almost been killed because of. Delusional little boy!" She shrieked.

The Ron image laughed evilly.

"That's right, mate. You only drag us into danger. You almost got all three of us killed because the Dark Lord wants you dead. I wish I'd have never met you! You've been nothing but trouble! My sister was almost killed because of you! So was my Dad! Your no good to me Potter! I'm better off with out you!"

Harry felt tears in his eyes as the blade wavered, his will slowly breaking. The room was in shocked silence as they watched. The Hermione image grinned evilly.

"Oh, you were a good shag. I'll admit that, but your not worth losing my life over. If I had to pick between my safety and being at your side, I'd rather let you die than be brought down with you! I never loved you anyway! How else was I supposed to get Ronald to notice I was a girl? You were only good for that."

Harry began to feel his heart break at what he was seeing. The images were wrapped up in each other, sneering at him.

"We're better off with out you." The image of Ron stated coldly.

Harry began to shake with his grip on the sword weakening when a pair of soft hands encompassed his own. He looked over and saw the real Hermione standing beside him, tears in her eyes.

"It's not true Harry. I do love you."

"Lies!" The Image-Hermione hissed.

"Shut it you tramp." Hermione hissed back.

The image recoiled from this as Harry looked back to the locket. The eye held fear in it as Harry raised the sword back up. With a roar, he slammed the point into the eye. Everyone in the room heard the inhuman scream as the blade pierced the locket, destroying the Horcrux. The flash of light upon it's destruction had everyone shielding their eyes for several seconds before they opened them again. Looking back at the spot where Harry had been, they all saw

that he had sunk to the floor and was being comforted by Hermione. The girl stroked his hair gently, whispering comforting words to him as he fought to get his emotions under control. Sirius rose from his seat, looking at everyone with a hard gaze.

"This is why he has to be stopped. This monster plays on our fears. And I for one am through with him terrorizing all of us. We have to fight. And I mean fight. Not relying on stunnners and hoping they stay down. That time has passed. This time, when we put them down, they stay down...for good."

A few of them looked back to Harry before returning their gaze back to Sirius. Remus had a feral grin on his face. Voldemort hurt Harry deeply and he was out for blood, with the wolf inside him roaring it's approval.

"When do we start, Mr. Padfoot?"

Sirius returned his grin with the same crazy, haunted look he had when he had escaped Azkaban.

"Well, Mr. Mooney. Cry havoc and let slip the dogs of war."

Hey guys, again sorry for the delay. I promise that the next chapter will be up no later than thursday next week with One Last Chance getting an update by Monday. At this point in the story, the shit is getting ready to go down. The Order will be more active and battles will be fought. And another character death is approaching. I won't tell you who and it won't be for a few more chapters. Again, sorry for the delay. Remember to drop me a review.

Chapter XIV

The Rising Fighting Spirit

The next week passed in a blur for Harry as they began planning on how to fight the Death Eaters. During that week, Arthur had informed Harry that Molly had been dealt with for the use of love potions. Apparently, when Arthur questioned her under veritaserum, she had admitted to trying to get Harry and Ginny together while at the same time, pushing Ron and Hermione together. The Twins told Harry that Mr. Weasley had been so mad at this point that he actually blasted a hole in his tool shed, destroying several of his muggle devices in the process. He also received news from the Twins that Ginny had been released under Probation for the next year. If she relapsed, they have to put her in the permanent ward for long term treatment from her brainwashing. Harry felt sorry for her but it wasn't enough for him to want to visit her. Mainly because they were trying to determine targets for the Order to hit. Harry rubbed his eyes as he looked over the reports from the spies and recon teams that had been sent out last week after the meeting.

"I wonder if Godric had to deal with anything like this." Harry muttered to himself.

"Yeah. But at least he didn't talk to himself." A voice sounded out.

Harry snapped his eyes open and had his wand drawn, searching for a target. A chuckle greeted him as he caught sight of a dusty old hat. Not just any hat...

"You're the Sorting hat!"

The hat seemed to smirk.

"And your Harry. However, I see that I must properly introduce myself. It is only proper. I was given the name, Alexander by Godric the day I was created. You, dear boy, may call me Alex for short."

Harry lowered his wand.

"Well...er...it's nice to meet you...officially. Not to be rude, but why are you here?"

The hat smiled.

"Simple. I'm here to offer the services of Hogwarts herself in your battle against Mr. Riddle. I take it you don't know that you are Heir of each founder in blood and magic?"

Harry felt his jaw drop.

"But...Riddle is Slytherin's Heir. I don't know about the others though."

Alex nodded.

"It is true that Tom is indeed an Heir of Salazar's, but he is not the rightful Heir. His ancestor, Salazar's youngest son, was disowned when he created a rather vile piece of magic. I take it you can guess who I am speaking of?" Alex inquired.

Harry's eyes widened.

"Herpo the Foul?"

The hat nodded.

"Exactly. Salazar heard of what he was doing and disowned him. He thought he had prevented him from spawning a child, but was unaware that he had taken a wife in secret. That child was born three months after Herpo was killed and grew up reading through her father's notes. She was the first Dark Lady to spring up on our shores. Riddle's ancestor married into the Gaunts. She eventually disappeared from the public, raising her children in solitude and the Gaunts remained that way until Mr. Riddle arrived."

Harry took all this in and looked back at the hat in confusion.

But what about me? How do I fit in?" Harry asked.

The hat paused.

"That is where it gets a bit confusing. You see, you're a direct descendant of the Peverell. They were one of the earliest to die off in the male line. The youngest brother had a single child, a daughter and she married into the Hufflepuff line. Four generations later, that

lone married into the Potter line, followed two generations later by the last female from the Gryffindor line. Ravenclaw had married into Godric's line while he was in his tenure as a teacher at Hogwarts. Your tied into Slythrein because his second child, a daughter, married the third brother. This is why you are the heir to Hogwarts and why it was so hard for me to place you. Because you have all the traits of each of them in your blood."

Harry lowered himself into the chair and just stared at the hat for several seconds.

"I guess that explains why Hogwarts feels like home to me." He said with a half hearted smile.

"And why you are safest there. Hogwarts has many defenses at her disposal, but they can't be used expect by the heirs, or as it is today, heir. Hogwarts and I have agreed that it's best not to try to get you to come back to the castle. We feel the war brewing and understand that it isn't yet time for you to return to us. However, remember what Albus used to say. Help will be given at Hogwarts to those who seek it. Well...he misquoted it, but he has the gist of it." The hat said with a hint of amusement.

Harry also had to smile at that as Alex seemed to look off into space before grinning.

"Seems Hogwarts has deemed my services not required this year. She has decided to do the sorting herself. That should be amusing to hear her song for the ceremony."

Harry cocked his head in confusion.

"She can do that?"

The hate nodded...well, tried to nod.

"Yes. It is a fallback in case I am ever...misplaced. She is just as aware and alive as I am. Besides, Mi' Lord. My place is with you, Lord Potter, Heir of Hogwarts."

And to Harry's shock, Alex bowed to him.

"Thank you, Alex. I do need help. A lot more than I have at my disposal for what I'm planning."

Alex grinned.

"Than place me upon you head, and to the great help I can lend. A ragged old hat I maybe, but sharper a mind you'll never see. For with the courage of Godric, rest his soul, graced with the intelligence of Ravenclaw of old. Add a dash of Slythrein's cunning, and Hufflepuff's fidelity, the enemy of the Heir, beware. Adhere to this warning, for by the waning of the moon and the stars, death be the final call. So say I, Alexander the Sorting Hat of the mighty Hogwarts. SO MOTE IT BE!"

Harry felt his eyebrow twitch as he picked the hat up.

"Was that just a magical oath to help me take down Riddle? Or do you just like to sing?"

"I'm a thousand and so years old. I'm entitled to do as I please. Now, let's take a peek in your head, and find a nice plan before bed."

Harry frowned.

"We're getting off track, you old tatty hat."

"No worries friend for this hat's got you back."

Harry's frown deepened.

"Hang on a second, am I rhyming too?"

The hat gave the mental equivalent of a shrug.

"Don't ask me, I ain't got a clue."

Harry shook his head.

"This is like something out of Doctor Seuss."

The hat gave a sigh.

"Why can't you stop thinking about Hermione's caboose?"

Harry stuck out his tongue.

"Enough with all the rhyming. We've got other things to worry about. As for your plans, I think I can help you out, but I need to do something first," Alex told him.

Harry nodded his head for him to continue and felt a warmth from his head. The young man rose to his feet and looked into the mirror and felt a pulse of shock. The Hat looked brand new. Harry pulled him off and set him on the table where the hat seemed to try to get a feel of it's new, younger form before it smiled.

"Ah...I feel as though I was just stitched yesterday. Now, as for your targets. The potion storage center is a bit too ambitious to take on just yet. I'd recommend taking out the small command post that they have in the Ireland. It's small, lightly manned, and offers the best chance of success."

Harry looked back at the map and nodded.

"Agreed. Problem is, we lack the man power to attempt it with trying to keep our hold here on Britain." He said, rubbing his chin.

"Not with the DA behind you, you aren't." A male voice said from behind him.

Harry spun around and saw Neville grinning at him from the doorway with Cedric and Luna there as well.

"What are you three doing here?" He asked.

The fidelius hadn't been setup yet so that meant Sirius or someone had told them about the place.

"What should have been done after last year. We want to fight." Cedric stated.

Neville nodded his head.

"We heard from the twins what happened last week. And we agree. The kiddy gloves come off and it's time for our generation to stand up and continue the fight our parents started."

Harry had never heard that much confidence come out of his fellow Gryffindor before and it derailed his whole counter argument. He looked over the three and sighed.

"I guess I can't talk you out of this, can I?"

Neville grinned.

"Nope. So what's the plan, boss man?"

"Not another rhyme." Harry groaned.

"Nah, just a simple one liner." Cedric stated.

"I think it's time for dinner." Harry said, trying to keep the rhymes to a minimum.

The other three grinned and left the room as Harry turned to the Sorting hat, who was trying to look innocent.

"That look is really failing."

The hat grinned.

"Eh...even though I enjoy your whining, I'll stop my impressive rhyming."

Harry palmed his face and went back over the plans before he talked with the others. The first major offensive by the Order was about to happen. He only hoped it would be worth it.

-X-X-X-X-X-

The raid went better than Harry had hoped for. Neville, Cedric, Luna, and a few others who were either muggleborn or labeled a blood traitor had joined him, Remus, and Sirius in the assault. Harry had been impressed by Fred and George when they arrived with sets of what they labeled assault armor. Now, Harry may not have been much of a game player, but he recognized that the armor bore a strong resemblance to the armor from a game called Doom. It was simply a dark grey chest piece with knee and elbow pads along with a charmed helmet to always remain cool inside and to never fog and

such. They showed that it fit under a standard black cloak. Sirius had mentioned that it was very similar to a design that the Auror Corps had been looking at a few years before his incarceration but had shot it down because of the costs. Harry decided that the Ministry was foolish not to fund the armor as it has saved Sirius his life when a cutting curse had slammed into his chest, only denting the mental chest piece. The only downside was coming back to head quarters after a week in a half, was the debriefing. Everyone had at least one kill on this mission. And they would need to talk about it. Harry had already killed before, so he knew what was going to happen. He hadn't expected this raid to be as tough, but it was worth it. The two squads arrived at Grimmauld just before dinner, tired and needing a good meal and a chance to understand what they had done. Harry was the first in and was immediately pulled into a hug by Hermione who began fussing over him.

"Are you alright? Why are you covered in blood?" She asked, looking him over, trying to find the wound.

Truth was, the blood on his armor belonged to Dwalish, a former Auror who had recently joined the wrong side. Harry gave her a tired smile.

"I'm fine. We're going to debrief after dinner. Your welcome to sit in."

Hermione decided to do just that. It seemed that the mission started perfectly. They arrived at the target location within a matter of hours by muggle means, not wanting to draw attention to themselves. Sirius and Cedric began reconnaissance on the installation for three days, gathering information on the patrols and such. They did mock runs for the next two days before the attacked. Using the cover of night, they infiltrated the compound and began to wreak havoc inside with a transformed Mooney. Under the wolfs bane potion, he was in control of himself as he tore into quite a few Death Eater. Harry had three kills to himself with Neville, Cedric, Luna, and the twins totaling twenty between them. Sirius polished off the last five himself just before the remaining Death Eater managed to fire a curse at him, just as Mooney got to him. A total of twenty-nine Death Eaters had been killed and a minor command post was now gone. Harry gave a brief victory speech to help boost their spirits, but knew from past experience, it would mean very little to them. They had to find out how to deal with what they had done by themselves. So Harry dismissed them and waited for Hermione to ask her questions.

"Are you sure your okay?"

Harry nodded as he sat back down in his seat, looking at the table with a neutral expression. Hermione bit her bottom lip before continuing.

"I've got some news on the Horcrux front."

At this, Harry's head snapped up and he locked his gaze on her.

"What have you found?"

"I sent a letter to Gringotts, asking if they knew anything and if any had been stored in their vaults. Their reply was less than happy. They seemed really angry that quite a few had been found inside a few of the vaults, including Bellatrix Black."

Harry raised an eyebrow.

"Black? She got divorced?" He asked.

Hermione smirked.

"You could say that. Sirius dissolved her marriage. All the LeStrange assets have been seized and placed in the Black vault."

Harry had to grin. Leave it to a Marauder to figure out something like this.

"What else did they say?" Harry asked.

"They want to know if you'd like to have the object back once it's cleansed of Riddle's soul."

Harry wondered why they offer that unless...

"It's Hufflepuff's, isn't it?" He asked,

Hermione nodded and Harry leaned back and sighed.

"At least I don't have to break in to Gringotts and search every vault for the damn thing. What about the other's they found?"

Hermione shrugged her shoulders. She wasn't told, and truth was, she only cared about Riddle's.

"Destroyed them, I assumed. What's our next move?" She asked.

Harry looked back at the table and saw four more locations for attacks marked. He sighed and stretched.

"We'll figure it out tomorrow. Right now, I just want to rest while I can."

-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry cursed as he ducked behind cover. This was the fifth raid and they had been ambushed on their way out. Voldemort seemed to have gotten wise to what was happening and planned to catch whoever it was killing his men. Harry peaked his head out and pulled it back quickly as another green just shot towards him. He heard the insane laughter of Bellatrix and kept his anger under control. He still owed her for what she'd done to Hermione.

"Come out little Shadow." She called. "I just wait to torture you a little."

"Bite me, bitch." Harry retorted.

If he saw the feral grin on Bella's face, he'd have shivered in fear.

"Gladly."

Harry shuddered as he prepared to move. He leapt out and sent three silent stunners at Bella that she deflected Harry managed to get behind cover again before she could respond. He took a moment to look around the warehouse before giving a frustrated sigh. As much as he hated to do this, he had no choice.

"SQUAD! Fall Back! Bravo six maneuver!"

That told everyone to get the hell out of the building and scatter in all direction via whatever means they had and to continue making random direction for thirty minutes before heading back to

rendezvous point alpha just twelve clicks away and to use the floo to get back to headquarters'. Harry heard a silky voice sound out.

"I think not."

Lucius Malfoy came striding into the room, wand raised in his left hand since his right was gone. Harry moved to cover Hermione as she headed for the exit, but failed to notice Bella come at him from his blindside. Harry felt the spell strike him from behind, heard a familiar voice calling his name as the world went dark.

-X-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry woke with a start. He tried to move his body, but learned quickly that he was restrained to a chair. He slowly looked up and saw Bellatrix looking at him with a sadistic grin and Lucius looking smugly at him.

"Well, well. Mr. Potter. So good of you to join us. As you can tell, we haven't killed you yet. You see. We know you're the leader of this little band of rebels. We also know that your headquarters is also under the Fidelius."

Harry glared at them.

"And how'd you come to that conclusion, braniac?" Harry asked.

Lucius smirked and fired a crucio at Harry, making him grit his teeth in pain. After a few seconds, Lucius lifted it.

"That is but a taste of what is to come."

Harry spit at Lucius' feet.

"Why don't you call you half blood master already?"

He heard Bella shriek in rage and felt another torture curse strike him, this time it was held for half a minute. Harry began panting, feeling the sweat run down his body, the pain still lingering.

"Potter, it might be best if you just tell us what we wish to know."

"Fuck you." Harry seethed.

He received another curse for his trouble. Harry felt like he was being stabbed by thousand of white hot needles all over his body. After a minute, it was released. Harry felt his leg spasm and tried to control his breathing. Lucius sighed.

"If you tell us what we wish to know, we'll stop this. Then kill you of course. And then your friends. Tell us where they are."

Harry looked up at him and smirked.

"Kiss my ass blondie."

Lucius glared at him and sent another crucio at him. Harry felt his body spasm and screamed in pain from the intensity of the curse. He felt as if liquid fire had been injected into his veins. Five minutes later, which felt like an eternity to Harry, it stopped. He began panting, wincing at the pain in his body.

Lucius gave a tut.

"Seems we are getting nowhere with just torturing him. Go get the girl."

Bella grinned evilly when she saw Harry's head snap up and his eyes go wide.

"With pleasure."

Bella left, leaving Harry and Lucius alone. Lucius examined his wand casually.

"See what your stubbornness has gotten you? Instead of just telling us what we wish to know, you've condemned your little whore to pain and suffering. And then she'll die. A shame, really. She is quite bright." He said with a smile.

Harry watched as Bella entered the room, almost dragging Hermione by her hair. He could see the fear in her eyes as she was thrown into the chair across from Harry and bound to it. Bella pointed her wand at Hermione and had glee in her eyes.

"Now, young Potter. Listen carefully. Every time you defy us and either lie with your answer, or don't answer, your little slut get crucioed. Now let's begin. Where is the Headquarters of the Order of The Phoenix?"

"Don't tell him Harry! No matter what happens to me, don't tell him!"

Harry looked at Malfoy with pure hatred.

"You little coward. You'd rather torture a woman than face me as a man. You're a disgusting little shit!"

Lucius signaled Bella who happily complied with hitting Hermione with the torture curse. Harry felt rage and pain roar inside him. Oh, they were both going to die. After only thirty seconds, Hermione's screams faded, but Harry could hear her whimpers.

"One more time Potter. Where is the Order of the Phoenix Located?"

"You really want to know?" he asked.

"Yes. I do." Lucius stated flatly.

"Alright, I'll tell you."

"Harry, no!" Hermione cried, but was silenced by a punch from Bellatrix.

Harry lowered his head for a moment before looking back up at Lucius, smirking.

"Go to Hell."

A sudden explosion rocked the building. Lucius looked around quickly, as did Bella. Both failed to notice Harry breaking his bonds. Lucius looked back to them first and his eyes widened comically when he saw Harry on his feet. The teen gave the older man no chance to react and had moved forward, Gryffindor's sword appearing in his hand. Harry grabbed Lucius by the throat and slammed the blade into his chest, right into his heart. Harry grinned at the man evilly as the life in his eyes began to fade.

"I told you. You were a dead man the moment you brought the woman I loved in here. Don't worry. Your half blood master will be joining you in hell soon enough." He said in a low voice.

Harry gave the blade a twist, shredding the heart before he pulled it out. All of that had happened in just under ten seconds. By the time Bella had turned back around, Harry had his wand aimed at her left shin. Her mouth opened in shock as Harry sent the bone breaking hex at her. Harry disarmed her as she fell and snapped her wand in front of her. He kept his wand pointed at her as Sirius and Neville entered the room, both men aiming at Bella. She looked up at Harry and sneered.

"You won't kill me."

Harry nodded.

"Your right. As much as I'd like to kill you for causing the miscarriage of my child, Neville is first in line. I think you remember the Longbottoms, right?"

Her face paled as a stone faced Neville walked over to Harry. The other man simply looked at her in disgust.

"Mercy." She mouthed as Neville aimed his wand at her.

"Where was the mercy when you tortured my parents into insanity? Reducto!"

Harry watched as the spell impacted right between her eyes and out the back of her head. Bellatrix's eyes rolled up into her head and her body fell forward, blood pooling around her corpse. Harry placed a hand on Neville's shoulder as the other teen looked at the body in grim satisfaction. Harry then turned to Hermione and helped her up and together, they all left the compound. With the loss of two of his Lieutenants, Voldemort was sure to be pissed. And pissed people make mistakes.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry woke with his lower regions throbbing slightly. This had been a regular occurrence over the past month since their raid. Blinking the sleep out of his eyes, he looked around and saw Hermione

sitting near the window, wrapped in a sheet. Harry rose out of bed with a stretch and slipped over to her side. She didn't even look back at him as he placed a hand on her shoulder.

"It's all changing, isn't it?" She asked softly.

Harry nodded.

"Yeah. Dark times are still coming."

Hermione looked back at Harry, with a sad smile.

"War has changed us all, Harry. Just look at Neville. He had barely enough confidence in himself. Now look. He's taken on five to seven Death Eaters by himself. Look at Luna. She's managed to devise ways to get into a compound with minimal effort on our part. And that's just the tip of the spear. We have six elements operating around the whole United Kingdom. We've brought his number's down from 430 members to only a hundred with all our raids. And our numbers continue to rise. We're becoming warriors Harry."

Harry sighed.

"I know. But we have to fight the darkness. The way I figure it, we fight for the light through the grey. Our only other option is to let darkness take over. And Neither of us wants that."

Hermione nodded her head and gave him a small smile.

"As long as I'm with you, I'll always be happy."

Harry grinned and gave her a short kiss as a response. He straightened up and pulled his boxers on just as a loud crack filled the room. Harry leapt back, wand flying to his hand as he put Hermione behind him. His tension dropped when he saw Dobby looking at him with anxiety. Harry kneeled down to the elf.

"What's wrong Dobby?"

The elf wasted no time.

"Harry Potter sir must come with Dobby. Ollivander sir is in trouble. Dobby hears Dark Lord planning to execute him!"

Harry looked back at Hermione, who nodded her head, telling him it was alright.

"Give me ten minutes Dobby. We're going to save us a wand maker."

-X-X-X-X-X-

The old man sighed as he leaned back against the wall of his cell and wondered idly how he'd die. Perhaps it would be quick? His musing were cut short by the appearance of Harry Potter and a small house elf. Ollivander let a smile slowly spread across his face.

"Harry Potter. I wondered when I would be seeing you again."

Harry hurried over to the old man and motioned for Dobby to hurry over to him. Harry heard what could only be described as a lock being undone and knew he only had a few seconds.

"We're getting you out of here. Dobby. Take him first. Wait for me to call you. Do you understand?"

Dobby looked ready to argue back but decided against it,

"Of course, Harry Potter sir. Dobby will be waiting."

Harry nodded and drew his wand, his black robes billowing as his dark grey armor glistened in the light of the cell.

"Get going."

Dobby grabbed hold of the old man and vanished instantly. Harry took a deep breath and readied himself. He hadn't told Hermione that Tom was here at Malfoy Manor. He would fight the man tonight, to give him a warning. His time was coming. The door to the room opened with a scrape and in came the last person Harry thought he'd ever see. Peter Pettigrew froze at the sight of Harry in full battle gear, his eyes widening in shock.

"Hello Peter. Go ahead and scream. I'm here for your master anyway, you traitorous rat." Harry hissed.

Peter leapt back, wand drawn.

"P-P-POTTER! IN THE CELLER!"

"REDUCTO!" Harry sent the curse right at Pettigrew's heart, killing the man instantly.

The young man looked at the body in disgust and stepped over it and up the stairs. Two more Death Eaters came running towards him, wands ready. Harry grabbed one of his scrolls and sent a pulse of magic into it, summoning a pair of shadow wolves. The wolves snarled and leapt at the Death Eaters, fangs quickly sinking into their throats. Harry heard the gurgled screams as their throats were ripped out. He made his way into a large main hall and noticed half a dozen Death Eaters come out of the wood work. Pulling out a second scroll and activating it, a massive stone golem appeared and began going after the wizards. Harry stepped back and watched the carnage as the Golem crushed it's opponents with sickening crunches. Harry headed to the room where he knew Tom was. Harry sent a burst of raw magic at the door, blasting them open. The teen entered the room and stopped at the table, all eyes darting from him, to Tom himself.

"Good evening, Tom."

Riddle glared at him.

"Harry Potter. You must have a death wish."

"No. At one point in time, I might have agreed with that. But not anymore. I here to let you know that I'm coming for you Tom. You and all of your Death Eaters. You've caused me pain and misery. And I'll pay you back, ten fold."

Riddle sneered.

"As if you could take me! Avada-AHHHH!"

The sight before them was terrifying. Harry had leapt forward and transformed into a massive Shadow Wolf and had Voldemort by the throat. Harry savagely threw him into the wall and growled menacingly at everyone else in the room. Several screams were heard as two more Shadow wolves charged through the open door,

skidding to a stop on either side of him. Harry gave a short bark and they tore out of the room and out into the night.

-X-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry arrived back at Headquarters several hours later, exhausted. Harry entered and was greeted by Sirius and Remus. Both gave him a knowing look.

"You transformed." It wasn't a question.

Harry sighed and morphed into his animagus form, causing Sirius to yelp and leap back. Remus stepped back as the wolf in him began to whine.

"Harry. You're a shadow wolf!" Sirius cried out.

A massive black wolf with green eyes looked at him with amusement. He stood at least five feet tall from shoulder to ground, but averaged out at at least six from head to ground. Remus looked at him with a serious expression.

"Not just any shadow wolf. He's an alpha."

Harry looked over at him and nodded. The two summons had explained this to him on the trip back. Sage and Shadow were very helpful in explaining why he was a foot taller than them. The teen turned back into a human and saw the look of pride on their faces.

"He needs a name." Sirius declared.

Remus nodded.

"Yes, but what?"

"Shade." A voice called.

Both men looked to see the Sorting hat sitting on the banister. Sirius grinned as he looked to Remus.

"What do you think? Listen to the hat?"

Remus smirked.

"Shade it is then."

The two turned to him.

"Mr. Mooney would like to welcome Mr. Shade into our little group."

"Mr. Padfoot thinks it is a most glorious day when the spawn of prongs walks among those of rule breaking history."

Harry grinned at them and bowed.

"Mr. Shade thanks Messers Mooney and Padfoot for that outstanding welcome, but asks that they keep this knowledge to themselves."

Both men nodded and left the hall, knowing that Harry had something to discuss with the hat. Alex seemed on edge.

"What is it?"

Alex sighed.

"We found the last two Horcrux with the Headmaster's help."

Harry was well aware that Snape had taken the post on Voldemort's insistence.

"And?"

Alex gave him a grim look.

"You're not going to like this."

Harry had a feeling he knew where this was going.

"His snake and something in Hogwarts." He guessed.

Alex nodded.

"Ravenclaw's Diadem. Hidden in the Room of Requirements."

Harry gave a frustrated sigh.

"Great. The next thing I know, Voldemort will realize he's down to his last two anchors and make this all rushed." Harry caught the look Alex had. "Oh, you have got to be shitting me."

"Afraid so. He found out the Goblins destroyed one. The Headmaster says that he's on his way to Hogwarts to check that one first. He will be there by tomorrow morning. Seems he got mauled by a shadow wolf."

Harry was about to open his mouth to speak when soothing woman's voice sounded.

"Mi' Lord. It is time to return to us. The time of the final battle is at hand."

Harry nodded and headed into the kitchen and found Remus and Sirius just chatting. Both men stopped when they saw Harry's face.

"Gather the order and have them ready to move out in one hour."

Harry turned to leave, but was stopped by Sirius.

"What's going on, Harry?"

Harry looked back at him.

"Voldemort's headed to Hogwarts to check his Horcrux there. The final two will be in the castle, as will he. I plan to be there to end this. Are you with me?"

"Marauders stick together. We're with you one hundred and fifty percent."

Harry's expression darkened.

"Good. I've got an appointment with destiny...and I don't intend to miss it."

This is it guys. Only five more chapters left. The next five chapters will focus mostly on action and tying up loose ends of the story. And yes, I'm planning a few character deaths, Also, I haven't forgotten about Ron. He will show up soon enough. And yes, Harry became

an animagus. I chose a shadow wolf since it's close to what my name means. But I don't a sheild wolf is a real animal. I hope you enjoyed this chapter. It's the second one that I've finished that took me till after 1 am to finish. Oh, and brownie points if anyone figures out the two references I have in the chapter. Later guys!

Chapter XV

Chamber the Cartridge

Harry walked into the kitchen at Grimmauld Place and took in the grim atmosphere of the room. Harry nodded to the crowd as he took his place at the head of the table.

"Thank you. I know your all wondering why you've been summoned here today."

Seeing several nods, Harry continued.

"We have found out and located the final two Horcrux Voldemort has."

Several cheers went up, but a few people saw Harry's grim face.

"One's at Hogwarts, isn't it?" Bill Weasley asked.

Everyone looked from the eldest Weasley to Harry with shock and fear on his face.

"I'm afraid so. Ravenclaw's Diadem has been hidden under everyone's nose for centuries now. It must be destroyed along with his snake."

Bill looked at him with shock. Being a curse breaker, he knew of Horcrux and how dangerous they were.

"He used a living being? That is not the wisest move on his part."

Harry nodded.

"That's correct Bill. But yes, he did. Now, we have a chance to defeat him once and for all, but this is our only chance. You see, he received news that the Horcrux in Bellatrix's vault was destroyed. He's going to check on his other ones. This is where the plan starts."

"He's on his way to Hogwarts." Kingsley spoke.

Several panicked voices rang throughout the room from members who had children or siblings at the school. Harry tried to get

everyone to calm down before a loud bang caused several people to fall out of their chairs. Everyone looked to Hermione who had her arms crossed and a look of pure concentration on her face. Harry nodded his thanks before he continued.

"Now, I know you're scared. I would be too. But I will not just let them flounder around on their own."

Several faces showed hope.

"We, that is to say the Order and the DA will go and augment the defenses of Hogwarts. Once Voldemort arrives, and finds out I'm there, he'll raise eight kinds of hell trying to get to me. But I believe that we can stop him here."

"What about the children? Can't we just get them and run?" Some one asked.

Harry took a deep breath.

"No. We've made too many compromises already. Too many retreats. They attack our people, we fall back. They destroy whole families, and we fall back. No more. The line must be drawn here. This far and no farther. And we will make them pay for what they done."

Harry looked at the assembled crowd as they looked at him in awe. Movement caught his eye and he saw Bill on his feet.

"I'm behind you Harry."

Charlie grinned as he placed a hand on his brother's shoulder.

"Count me in."

The Twins grinned and stood as well.

"Don't forget us."

After they rose, the whole room was on their feet, pledging to follow him to victory. Harry smiled and nodded.

"Alright. Time to get down to business. Our defense plan is simple. The DA will be reorganized into the Order. I know that you think many of them are kids, but their well trained. Snape has been secretly training them so that they would be ready for something like this. Luna is currently in charge of the Order at Hogwarts at the moment. Now, the plan is to hold the castle. We'll need snipers in the upper floors raining different kinds of pain down on any target that approaches. They'll also have to deal with any giants that he brings with him, and we all know he will. If I know Tom, he'll want to stride right up the main path and straight to the main doors. That gives us leeway and set up a perfect kill zone. But once he knows what's going on, he'll want entry."

Remus looked concerned and Harry was curios to hear what was on the man's mind.

"Remus?"

Said man looked a little uneasy.

"You've said nothing of the grounds around the school. How are we going to defend them?"

"Hogwarts has siege wards in place. But they won't last long against an onslaught of the size I'm expecting. And we don't have enough people to cover the whole thing. Hell, the bloody forest has no walls to prevent them from coming in that way. It'll be a killing ground out there. Our advantage lies with fighting in the castle. It will force them to come at us through set points. They'll be funneled into our sights." he spoke confidently.

"What kind of defense are you planning on using to thin their numbers?" Sirius asked.

"Fred? George? Are the Betties ready?"

Fred grinned and nodded as his Twin took on a very evil smirk.

"Oh, their ready alright. Anything with in ten feet is going to be pretty banged up. If your within four feet of it, the blast compression will kill them. Any closer and there'll be nothing left of them." George answered.

Harry nodded and looked back to Sirius who seemed to be satisfied, even if he didn't know what they were talking about. Harry took another look before he pushed on.

"Alright. We've got five hours until Voldemort is able to move to Hogwarts. It's time to roll out."

He turned and faced Alex who seemed to be rather impressed with Harry.

"Alex? Anyway, you can connect the floo here directly to Hogwarts?"

He shook his head.

"No, but Lady Hogwarts can allow you access herself."

"Mi' Lord. I have connected the fireplace with that of the Headmasters office. All travel is undetectable."

Harry felt relieved.

"Thank you, Lady Hogwarts. I will be there momentarily, as will the rest of the fighters."

He could feel the castles anticipation at the end of his sentence.

"Siege wards are up and in place, Mi' Lord. Riddle will not be able to breach them when he arrives."

"How long will they last?" Harry inquired.

"At most...two hours once his reinforcements arrive."

Harry frowned and nodded.

"It'll have to do." He muttered as he turned to everyone else.

"Grab some floo powder and head to Hogwarts and assemble in the Great Hall and wait for further instructions. Let's do this."

-X-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry tumbled out of the fireplace and hissed a few choice curses as he rose back to his feet. He heard a snicker and looked up to see Snape smirking at him. Harry glared at him.

"Oh, hush you old bat. We've got a job to do and laughing at me won't get it done."

Snape nodded and gestured to the seat behind the desk, making Harry look at him in confusion.

"She's been asking for you." Is all he said.

Harry shrugged and sat into the Headmaster's chair and felt a huge jolt of power. Harry felt the world rush away from him, streaks of light flying past. He could hear voices, but he was moving too fast to tell what they were. As fast as it began, it stopped. Harry blinked and looked around in confusion. It was a dark room, probably in one of the towers of the castle based on the clear sky and lake below it.

"Tis' our heir."

Harry spun to the voice and froze. Standing before him, were each of the founders. Salazar Slytherin, Helga Hufflepuff, Rowena Ravenclaw, and Godric Gryffindor. Harry gaped at them, his jaw hanging open as he took in what he was seeing. Helga and Rowena giggled while Salazar and Godric chuckled.

"Tis' an automatic response." Salazar stated.

"I think thou has broken him, Godric." Helga giggled.

Godric chuckled.

"Alas. How can thy own heir be shocked by his ancestors? Tis' a sad day indeed."

"Come now, Godric. How can thy tease thy own flesh and blood?" Rowena gave him a scowl Harry could have sworn he'd seen Hermione give him before.

Harry shook his head and decided they would get nowhere and he really had very little time as it was.

"Alright. So I'm assuming we're in the Castle and you all are here the same way or something similar as to how my parents and son talked to 'Mione and Dumbledore."

"At least my wisdom has passed through the ages." Rowena said happily.

Salazaar snorted and shook his head.

"Be that as it may, we have much to tell thy Heir. Let us commence."

Godric nodded and turned to the young man with a serious expression.

"Young Harry, I am sure that Hogwarts has told you of her defenses. And that they will not be enough to keep thy parents murderer out of this sacred place of learning."

Harry nodded as Salazaar looked at him with a neutral expression.

"But thou hast a good plan to defeat my bastard heir. With thy own skills and the power of the Hogwarts four, thou shall defeat the one who calls himself the Dark Lord."

"H-How do I use your power?"

All four smiled and moved to a corner of the room. Harry looked at them in confusion and slight fear.

"Fear not, child. We are not here to harm thee. We are transferring unto thee, our powers." Helga told him.

It still didn't make Harry feel any better as they each began to glow a different color. Godric red, Salazaar was green, Helga was yellow, and Rowena was blue. He watched in fascination as they began to grow brighter and brighter until it began to hurt to look at them. With a loud rushing noise, four beams of light shot toward Harry.

"Oh, shi-"

He was cut off by the beams impacting into his body. He felt heat, but no pain. Raw energy poured into him, but he felt no discomfort. Memories began flashing through his mind. Spells that the founders

knew and had used. Potion recipes that had been though lost. He felt something inside him snap and a rush of power and energy. Had he been aware of his surroundings, he'd have noticed he was floating a couple feet above the floor as the four beams seemed to encircle him. All at once, the converged, entering his body just over his heart. Harry's eyes snapped open as he dropped to the ground. He shakily rose to his feet and checked himself over before looking around the room. He could feel the power in him. The power of his ancestors. He looked back out the window and sighed. The sun was rising. Dawn was here.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry entered the Great Hall and saw the relieved expressions on their faces. He nodded to Hermione who came over to him.

"All the Younger students have been evacuated already. Last group left over two hours ago. Fred and George have their traps deployed. Every Order member who is fifth year or above are here."

Harry nodded as they walked toward the center podium.

"Anything else?"

"Voldemort was spotted in Hogsmeade, heading this way. Snape went to meet him as he was summoned." She responded as they reached the podium.

"How are we arranged?"

"Well, with the realignment of the order, we have ten squads of twelve. three squads are ready to move to the towers and the battlements as snipers. Four are standing by to hold the entrance hall with the remaining four scattered along the first floor with classrooms facing the avenue of attack. I also received word from Kingsley that they've rounded up as many Aurors as they can and will be here shortly."

"How many?" He inquired.

"About ten."

Harry sighed.

"Great. Well...we've had worse odds." He muttered, turning to those left in the Great Hall.

"I know your all scared. I am too. But this is where this whole nightmare ends. Each of you have your orders. I will not be on the frontlines in the beginning, as I have to find a dark artifact that Voldemort needs to stay alive. Once I find and destroy it, I will be right back with you all, fighting right besides you. I wish I could say more, but we're pressed for time. Everyone, battle stations!"

The whole hall roared as they started to move when a loud boom echoed through the halls. Harry drew his wand and stood ready.

"He has encountered the siege wards, Mi' Lord. His attacks are stronger than I had anticipated, however, the wards will still hold long enough to get the Diadem. The Room of Requirements is ready for you to take the object."

Harry nodded and headed off. The sound of feet hitting the floor behind him told him that his fighters got the hint. Everyone took off with a feeling of determination and focus. No one wanted to think that if this went south, then Voldemort would have no opposition.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry groaned as he saw the wand tips of two of his most unfavorable Slytherins. Crabbe gave them his best impression of an evil grin, but it looked like a monkey grinning after it had just shit on the ground and hit you with it. Which fit with his significant other, the Magila Gorilla stunt double, Goyle. Both boys looked pleased with themselves.

"Oh no. Crabbe and Goyle caught us. Whatever will we do now?" Harry asked with as much sarcasm as he could.

The blundering duo of course didn't notice it and took it as real fear.

"Dat's right Potty. We caught you. Thinkin' your so smart. Looks like the Dark Lord will be giving us great riches for killin ya and your mud blood whore!" Crabbe boasted.

Harry felt his blood boil and felt his inner wolf howling for blood. But he caught a scent that confused him. Harry glanced around as his inner wolf began to growl playfully. Apparently the giant furball knew what it was but didn't feel it friendly to tell Harry. But Harry, with his human limitations noticed Hermione was missing, He felt a chill, as if a predator was watching them. Goyle noticed Hermione was missing as well, since he had a look of deep thought on his face. Or he was constipated. One or the other.

"Where da mud blood?"

Crabbe blinked and looked next to Harry in confusion.

"Ya. Where ya hiding her Potty?"

"I'd like to know how I hid her from you since I've been at your wand point for the past ten minutes. Please. Explain this one to me, Pinky and the Brain."

Crabbe looked back at Harry with confusion as Goyle turned around and was staring at a shadow by the door.

"What do that mean?" Crabbe asked.

Harry didn't answer as Goyle spoke.

"Crabbe? Do shadows have glowy eyes?" He asked.

Harry and Crabbe both looked at the other teen, both curious about where he was going with this.

"Nah. Cats do though. Why?"

Goyle looked back at him while pointing at the shadow that Harry belated realized what it was exactly.

"Dis one has kitty cat eyes."

That was the last word spoken as the pure black panther leapt out of the shadows and landed on Goyle with a snarl. Goyle screamed in agony as the giant cat clamped it's jaws down on his wrist, causing him to drop his wand. Harry saw Crabbe aiming at the back of the cat and reacted on pure instincts, changing into Shade and

slamming into his back. Crabbe seemed to have a bit of training as he tried to roll onto his back and get a bead on Shade. But Shade had already moved to his upper half and grabbed him by his right shoulder, snarling and growling as he literally shook the boy around. Crabbe screamed in pain as Shade's fangs dug down to the bone. With a great shake, Shade threw Crabbe into a bookcase, knocking it over and dumping the books on the teen. Shade turned and saw the panther hissing at Goyle as the young man tried to scamper away. Shade quickly vanished into the shadows, using his nose to keep himself oriented toward his target. He could hear the snarls and yowls of the panther as it herded the teen into Shade's line of attack by a pair of book cases that cast dark shadows between them. Shade crouched low as the panther took a swipe at Goyle, causing the frightened Slythrein to move right into the perfect spot. Shade lept forward, snarling with his fangs bared. Goyle spun around and raised his wand arm a fraction of a second too soon. Shade got a hold of his arm and yanked the boy to the ground hard enough that his head slammed against the ground, knocking the boy out. Shade let go of the boy's wrist and looked back to the panther. The giant cat walked over to him and cocked its head to the side. Shade could see its amusement in its brown eyes. Shade's eyes narrowed as he realized who it was and gave a wolf equivalent of a grin. The panther purred and nuzzled his neck. After a second, the two transformed back to their human forms. Hermione gave Harry a sly grin. So this is what she had been working on these last few weeks.

"Huh. I figured you'd end up as a cat. Just not that large of a cat." he said with a grin.

Before she could retort, a voice cried out.

"You ain't won Potty! Frye!"

Harry's eyes widened as he saw the massive dark flames rush at them. Harry grabbed Hermione and pulled her out of the room, slamming the door behind them. They both began panting as they watched smoke billow out of the cracks around the doors. A second later, a scream of pain echoed from behind the doors, making both of them shudder. They left the room, letting it disappear along with the screams of pain that were issuing from the door. Harry looked down at the diadem and gave a sigh. Well, at least something good came from this. The young man looked at Hermione, who nodded. They headed off to the Great Hall to finish off this Horcrux.

-X-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry placed a hand on Hermione's shoulder as she fought to get her emotions under control. She wanted to destroy this one and regretted it the moment it tried to defend itself.

(Flashback)

"Alright. Hand me the sword."

Hermione hesitated, drawing Harry's attention.

"Hermione?"

He saw her biting her bottom lip and knew what she was going to say.

"I-I'll do this one."

Harry looked at her, thinking, before nodding and placing the Diadem on the table. Hermione stepped up to it and shakily rose the sword. The Horcrux sensed danger and leapt to action. A ghostly image appeared, just like the Locket and looked right at her. Her eyes widened as did Harry's at the image of Jack Potter. He sneered at Hermione.

"Hello...Mother." It spat.

Harry felt his gut clench at the sight. This was not going to end well.

"How does it feel to know that it's your fault I'm dead?" It inquired.

Hermione began to tear up. Their loss of their child still was a sore spot for them both. The Image seemed to sneer even bigger as it saw her response.

"N-no. N-not m-m-my fault."

"That's what you'd like to believe. That's what you keep telling yourself. But we both know the truth. If you hadn't been selfish. Hadn't been foolish and wanting to be besides my Father, then I'd be alive right now. You say you went for selfless reasons? Ha!" It

smirked evilly. "You wanted to be there. Admit it. You didn't want me in the first place. When you found out, you started to worry about not me, not Father, but yourself! How your family would view you. Your classmates. How I would screw up your future education. How you'd be rushed into marriage with Father. But the one thing that really took the cake when the test came positive was how much would an abortion cost."

Hermione began shaking, tears running down her face. She couldn't even find the will to dispute these accusations.

"N-no. I w-w-was s-s-cared at first...b-but..."

"Who are you trying to fool? Yourself or him? You wanted me out of the picture so your perfect life could still be realized. I was just going to be a burden."

Hermione began to sob as Harry felt rage building.

"SHUT THE FUCK UP!" He screamed at the Image. "Hermione, that's not Jack. It's only that foul thing trying to survive. You have to destroy it!"

The image smirked.

"Yes. Go ahead. Kill me again. Just like before!"

Hermione raised the sword, and with tears streaming down her face, brought it down. The blade slammed into it, shattering the diadem. The soul screamed in torment for a few seconds before it vanished into nothingness. Hermione let the blade clatter to the ground and slide to the floor, sobbing uncontrollably. Harry moved to comfort her, pulling her close as she buried her head in his chest.

"H-he was right! I-I did th-think that at first! It's ju-just that I was so scared! I didn't think I was ready to be a mother!"

Harry held her tightly as she sobbed into his chest.

"B-but that was when I found out. A-a-after I thought about it, I started to get excited. I w-w-wanted to have the baby. Screw my education. Screw what everyone else thought. I was going to live two of my dreams." She cried softly.

Harry began stroking her hair.

"And which two were they?" He asked.

"Becoming a mother and being the mother of your children." She whispered.

Harry gently lifted her chin and captured her lips briefly. He pulled away and saw her red, puffy eyes and gave her a soft smile.

"I know. And it's natural for you to have thought of that first. And I understand. I know you didn't mean for us to lose the baby. Bellatrix was at fault and Neville avenged both his parents and Jack for us."

Hermione nodded and wiped her eyes. Harry helped her back to her feet and the pair headed to the entrance hall, where Luna, McGonagall, Kingsley, and Sirius were. Luna was the first to speak.

"Order detachment three is in place. teams one and five are in place with two, three, and four in the towers. All passages are secured as are all of the entrances to and from the school." She reported.

Harry nodded and looked to McGonagall.

"All Hogwarts staff order members are in position on the battlements, waiting for the attack."

Harry looked to Sirius.

"All External Order members are in position as well. Teams four, five, seven, and ten are in the towers with the third detachment. Teams one, two, and three are also manning the battlements. Teams six, eight, and nine are on entrance hall."

"Auror force are in position around the entrance hall. Also, the Twins report that the traps are in place and ready."

"Thanks, Kingsley. Lady Hogwarts? How long until the wards fail?"

"Soon, Mi' Lord. Also, Headmaster Snape has moved to Voldemort's position."

"Is he trying to get killed?" Sirius asked.

Harry looked off in the direction of main gate and seemed to space out.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry could see Hogwarts. He was enraged. Some one had activated the siege wards, preventing any entry into the grounds. No matter. He'd break them. Then check his Horcrux here before checking the others. A noise greeted him. Harry looked to see his most faithful follower approaching him. He would pay dearly for this.

"Severus. Why has the castle reacted like this? I thought you commanded it?"

Snape frowned.

"I no more control Hogwarts than Pinus controls the ministry. He is but a puppet."

Harry was angered by this man.

"A fair sight better than you!" He spat.

Snape sneered.

"So you think I am your puppet? I have news for you, Tom. I am no one's puppet. Oh yes, I know I'm going to die here. And yes, I am aware that you plan to kill all those in the school. But it is my duty as Headmaster of the Great Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry to defend those inside it's walls unto my dying breath. So...to quote a certain Potter we are both fond of...'Bite me.'"

Harry snarled as he shot a crucio at him. He felt some satisfaction as the man writhed on the ground, screaming in pain. Harry laughed at the pitiful insect.

"Dance puppet. Dance for your master!" He jeered.

Snape spat at him and sent him a fierce glare.

"Your not the puppet master here, half-blood. Your just sick little boy with a tiny dick and a chip on your shoulder the size of china. Oh, daddy didn't love me. I know! I'll just kill and torture everyone else who are muggles and anyone else I deem necessary. All so I can feel better about myself and not be reminded that fate dealt me a shitty hand."

Harry saw red as he advanced on the other wizard.

"Die you son of a whore!" Harry roared and sent a killing curse right at Snape.

The man seemed to almost welcome it as the green jet slammed into his chest. Harry glared at the corpse as it ceased moving. He turned back to the school and put all of his anger and hate into his next spell.

-X-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry pulled back just as a loud explosion echoed across the grounds. Harry gritted his teeth as everyone looked around in confusion.

"The wards have fallen. He's coming and he is not happy."

"Mi' Lord. The headmaster is dead. As the founders heir, you are now the Headmaster of Hogwarts. There is much at your disposal." Alex stated as he appeared on Harry's head.

Harry knew this and was going to use them.

"Have everyone hold their fire for the moment." He didn't even notice the acknowledgements to his order as he pointed his wand at his throat.

"RIDDLE!"

Voldemort froze in his tracks at hearing Harry's voice echo through the grounds.

"YOU'VE ONE CHANCE TO END THIS WITHOUT ANY BLOODSHED. SURRENDER YOUR FORCES AND YOU WILL ALL BE PLACED IN AZKABAN, PRISONERS YES, BUT ALIVE."

Voldemort sneered at the castle as he enhanced his own voice.

"YOU TALK BIG POTTER. YOU AND WHAT ARMY ARE GOING TO STAND AGAINST ME?"

"THE ARMY THAT FIGHTS FOR THE LIGHT."

"THE LIGHT IS WEAK. I MAKE YOU A COUNTER PROPOSAL. THERE WILL BE NO MERCY FOR ANY OF YOU WHO DARE OPPOSE ME. BUT, IF YOU SURRENDER, YOUR DEATHS WILL BE QUICK. POSSIBLE PAINLESS. RESIST...AND IT WILL BE DRAGGED OUT. YOU HAVE SIXTY SECONDS TO RESPOND."

Voldemort sneered. No way would they resist. A long painful death was not something anyone wanted to experience.

"WE'VE GOT AN ANSWER FOR YOU. CONFUCIUS SAY...FUCK OFF, ASSHAT."

Voldemort became livid and stormed back to Snape's corpse. The dead Headmaster would be of some use as he yanked up his left sleeve and placed his wand tip against it. Within moments, every Death Eater he had appeared around him. They looked at their master with confusion as he looked at the Castle.

"I want everyone in there dead. I don't give a flying fuck if your child is inside. They chose their side. Traitors must be eliminated. Leave Potter and his whore to me. The rest are yours." He ordered with pure malice and hatred.

The Death Eaters hesitated before they screamed a battle cry and charged the school. From their vantage point, Fred and George couldn't believe the Death Eaters' stupidity.

"It's like they want us to kill them." Fred stated as they watched them approach the castle, spreading out.

"Yeah. Hell, they're even moving behind each other. Easy enough for a high powered reducto to punch through a few of them."

"Or a proper 7.62mm round from the L96 sniper rifle."

Both twins looked behind them in shock as Filch took a prone position with a muggle rifle. He saw their bewildered looks and snorted as he sighted back in on the targets.

"I didn't always used to be a caretaker for the castle. Once upon a time, I was a sniper in Her Majesties service for awhile. Even did the SAS. Now, I believe we have a fight on our hands?"

Both twins closed their jaws as they waited for the planned time for attack. They watched as the Death Eaters closed on the castle when the first casualty happened. A Death Eater heard a click as he approached and stopped when a small, cylinder like object shot out of the ground, spinning like a top.

"What the bloody hell?"

His answer came with a resounding boom from the explosion of the mine. Specifically, Bouncing Betties that Harry had the Twins modify to be even more lethal. Five Death Eaters were taken down, three of them dead. Around the grounds, mines began going off, cutting down Death Eaters as they tried to get closer. Harry watched as the death toll began to climb. In the tower, the snipers saw the last of the Betties go off. Roughly a quarter of the Death eaters were now either dead, or dying when they began their counter attack. Spells shot from the towers, picking off the wounded ones as the Battlements stood ready. If the sniper fire wasn't able to keep them back, they were the last line of defense between the interior of the castle and the enemy. Filch sighted in on his first target and took a slow breath and pulled the trigger with a stead motion. The rifle jumped as the round shot forward with a resounding crack! His target took the round to his abdomen and was blown backwards. The Old Cartaker frowned as he placed the weapon back into his shoulder, steadying himself again.

"Bit more kick than I remember." He muttered, going after his next shot.

The Twins immediately understood just why Argus Filch was a man to be feared. Down below, in the Entrance hall, they could hear the screams of the Death Eaters as they fought to get to the castle. Harry had yet to lose anyone, but knew that could change in a heartbeat. He just wondered how long it would be until Hogwarts

was breeched by the Death Eater. That was things would get really hairy.

IT'S OVER 90,000! Words that is. This is officially the longest story I have every worked on. My target goal is 105,500 words for this making it epic length (For me). Keep an eye out as this weekend will be a writtign frenzy for me. I'm going to put all my effort into this one. And yes, Jack was the next one used by I-USE-STUPID-NAMES-THAT-AREN'T-SCARY to save his ancient butt. Well, review so I know exactly how you plan to harm me for using Jack against Hermione. Points for creative ways to harm the author.

Chapter XVI

We Will Fall...

Voldemort stared out across the grounds, anger at how many men he had lost. One of his Death Eaters, McNair saw this carnage. He wondered why his master was so intent on killing this one man.

"Sir. Why do you want to kill him? You have all of Wizarding Britain. With those resources, he will be forced to leave the country. You will have won."

Voldemort frowned. It did make sense, but it was something he had to do. After a moment of silence, he responded.

"He tasks me. He tasks me, and I shall have him. I'll chase him round the United Kingdom, across the atlantic ocean, and round perdition's flames before I gave him up. Send in the giants."

-X-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry knew something was wrong as they watched the Death Eaters retreat from the grounds. They never fell back. Unless...A sickening thought entered his mind and Harry took off quickly to the next floor. Sprinting into an empty classroom, he peered out over the grounds and toward the forest. He prayed he was wrong...sadly this was one of the times he was correct. For out of the forest came the giants. Twenty to twenty eight foot tall beings with clubs twice Harry's height came stomping out of the Black forest. Harry cursed and quickly fired a reducto at the first giant, aiming at it's eyes, hoping the spell would penetrate enough to kill it.

-X-X-X-X-X-X-

Argus Filch felt his eyes widen as the giants stepped into the open. He sighted back in and sighed.

"What I wouldn't do for a tank right now." He muttered as he saw jet of light soar at the giants.

Beside him, the rest of the snipers opened up with reducto and any other spells that they could think of. The giants roared in rage as the spells began peppering them, not causing enough damage to bring

the massive beings down. Argus felt like he was shooting a bb gun at a freight train.

"This is going to be interesting."

-X-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry cursed as a club smashed through the building where he was. Harry could here the screams of those unfortunate ones who could not escape the giant's mad swipe. Harry fired off several more reductos at the Giant, pissing it off even more. He could see the punctures in it's skin. Harry scrambled away as the club descended again. The impact sent him stumbling backwards as he pointed his wand at Giant. Hoping the spell that popped into his head worked, Harry took aim.

"Confringo!"

Harry watched in morbid fascination as the Giant's head seemed to explode out of the front. The huge body fell backwards, sending tremors through the ground. Harry quickly moved to the next floor to help repel the attackers from a better vantage point. On his way, he met up with Fred while George was hurrying in the opposite direction.

"Filch has the tower. Bastard has a muggle rifle and is trying to kill as many things as he can."

Harry nodded and both of them came across the section that was smashed open. A hand was slapping around inside, trying to find something to squash. Harry heard a terrified scream and entered to see Luna and Ginny trying to escape. Without hesitation, Harry pointed his wand at the hand.

"Sectumsempra!"

Gashes like a sword appeared on the hand. It's owner yanked it back, howling in pain. Harry took this chance and took his aim, waiting for it to open it's mouth again. The Giant roared and Harry took his chance.

"Expulsio!"

Luna and Ginny looked away as a small explosion took everything from the lower jaw up off of the Giant. Harry didn't even watch it fall as he hurried back to the first floor. On the way down, he heard a loud crash and saw a wall of dust come shooting around the corner. Harry coughed as he moved forward and was intercepted by Sirius.

"Giants brought down one of the towers. Some of our people didn't get out in time."

Harry felt his stomach drop as he and his God Father headed back to the Entrance hall. He heard several more loud crashes before he manages to get to a window. Only two giants were still up and about. The young wizard didn't know what he could do to repel the Giants, but Hogwarts seemed to have an answer.

"Mi' Lord. I can send the giants away, but it will require all the power to the siege wards."

Harry paused, thinking it over. Either he says no and they get squashed by giants, or he allows it and they face a small army of Death Eaters. Decisions, decisions.

"Do it."

Outside, the Giants stopped and looked around in confusion before a massive blast of pure magical energy smashed into them. Harry watched them begin to spin before they rocketed up into the air and out of sight.

"Huh...Portkey." He muttered as he took his position.

He could see another wave of Death Eaters approaching, screaming out curses. Their spells impacted onto the castle, blowing chunks of stone off it. Harry poked his head out and saw the Death Eaters were getting closer than before. They were taking advantage of the decrease in defenders of Hogwarts. Harry growled in frustration. Another curse flew past his head, It felt like he was playing castle defense and the waves were getting harder to repel. It was a rugged fight that took the better part of a half hour before the Death Eaters were finally repelled. But the defenders had taken casualties. Several order members had been killed as with Argus Filch. The man had some how managed to get the others in the tower to safety before it collapsed upon him. Harry slumped against the wall, his

eyes barely focusing ahead at the wall. He barely noticed Hermione slumped down next to him.

"How many did we lose?"

"Eight, including Filch."

Harry sighed.

"If this keeps up, we won't be able to hold out much longer,"

Hermione nodded.

"What are you going to do?" She asked.

Before he could respond, a cold voice sounded across the grounds.

"Defenders of Hogwarts. You have fought bravely and skillfully. It is my deepest regret that so much magical blood has been spilled. The magical world can use beings which skills and courage in the new age I intend to bring. I make you an offer. If you all surrender and give me Potter, even those of muggle descent, will be spared and allowed to live out your lives in my world. You have thirty minutes to comply. I do hope you will make the right choice."

Harry looked back over the grounds as Voldemort's voice dissipated over the grounds. He took in the beauty of the grounds and wondered why he had always taken it for granted. With a sigh, he turned his gaze back to Hermione. She gave him a brief look of confusion before a look of horror crossed her face.

"No. No, no, no. You are not going to sacrifice yourself, Harry James Potter."

Harry gave her a sad smile.

"Hermione. I have to do this. If we keep fighting, we will all die. He will win. If I go out there, and face him...maybe I can kill him, Better odds." He said softly.

Hermione had tears in her eyes.

"B-but...w-what about us? Our future?"

Harry placed his hand gently on her cheek, savoring the warmth and touch of her skin.

"I would gladly live the rest of my life with you, To have a family and to see our grandchildren. But...if I have to sacrifice myself to ensure you survive, I'd gladly do that. Because I can't live without you."

Hermione looked at him with pain across her face,

"I can't live without you either."

"You'll learn. Stupefy." He whispered.

He watched her eyes close and her body slump against his. He took a deep breath and called out to Sirius. The man came running with a look of fear on his face.

"What happened to Hermione?" He asked.

"I don't know. Get her to Madam Pomfrey. I'll stay here and keep watch for anyone."

Sirius nodded and lifted Hermione and headed to the door. The man paused and looked back at him.

"Don't go anywhere, Harry. We'll fight."

Harry watched him go.

"And we will fall. It's the only option." He muttered as he drew his invisibility cloak.

Harry wrapped himself in it and headed toward the main gates. He wasn't disappointed to see several dozen Death Eaters waiting to charge the castle on their master's orders. Harry had no problem walking out the gates seeing as they were blown off their hinges. Slipping by the Death Eaters took a bit of work, meaning he had just arrived at the Shrieking Shack with only a minute left. He pulled the cloak off and walked inside and headed for the largest room. He could hear voices issuing from the room and steeled himself for what he had to do. He approached the door and paused when he heard his name.

"I figured he'd show up. I was sure he'd come to me in the end. I never took Potter for a coward." Voldemort was saying.

Harry could hear what sounded like disappointment.

"I'm no coward."

-X-X-X-X-X-X-

Sirius rushed to the Infirmary with Hermione, hoping that she was okay. He managed to skid into the Hospital Wing without harming Hermione himself and was relieved to see Madam Pomfrey.

"Quickly. Harry said she just collapsed."

Madam Pomfrey moved to her quickly and did a scan that confused her.

"She's just stunned. And unless I'm mistaken, it was from Mister Potter."

Sirius knew instantly what had happened, but wanted to know for sure.

"Wake her."

Pomfrey revived Hermione who shot up.

"Harry!"

Sirius placed his hands on her shoulders, looking at her seriously.

"Hermione. What is Harry planning?"

He knew he was right when he saw her burst into tears, burying her face into his chest.

"He's going to sacrifice himself!"

Sirius cursed and headed off to the entrance hall. Hermione made to follow him, but Pomfrey stopped her.

"You need to stay." She told her firmly.

"I'm fine." Hermione assured her.

She made toward the door, but the nurse held her firmly.

"It's not just you I'm trying to keep safe."

-X-X-X-X-X-X-

Tom looked at Harry with curiosity and respect for his nemesis.

"Harry Potter." He breathed.

"Lord Voldemort."

Voldemort gestured for Harry to sit down in the open chair across from him. Harry decided he had nothing left to do but sit. He was curious as to what Riddle was playing at.

"I see you heeded my warning. Now, before I do anything with you, I want to speak with you. It is only fair so that the whole story may come out after your death."

Harry cocked an eyebrow.

"What is the meaning of all this, Tom?"

Voldemort sneered.

"I thought I made my meaning clear. I wish to avenge myself upon you. But first, I want to speak with you. To see what made you so special. How could a boy with no particularly interesting powers defeat me? Hmm?"

Harry wanted to groan. It was almost verbatim what the diary had said in his second year.

"I told you this three years ago."

Voldemort laughed.

"True. Your mother's sacrifice did help. But how did you survive each of the other encounters? You fought well at the ministry. In fact, I'd say you rival Dumbledore at his peak."

Harry didn't show any emotion at his statement.

"You see, I have a theory. Would you like to hear it? Of course you do. You see, I believe that when I failed to kill you, I somehow gave you a tiny fraction of my abilities, and you, like a leach, have been siphoning your power off of them. And since I don't sense what I was looking for, I know now I can kill you with no ill effects to myself. Good bye Potter. Avada Kedavra!"

Harry watched the jet of green light fly at him as a single tear fell.

"Good bye Love. I hope you you'll forgive me."

Harry felt the jet hit and saw white.

-X-X-X-X-X-X-

Hermione looked at Madam Pomfrey confused.

"W-What?"

The woman smiled kindly.

"During my scan I noticed a second signature. Congratulations. Your one month pregnant."

She felt her jaw drop as her hand instinctively went to her abdomen.

"Pregnant? I'm...I'm gonna be a mother?"

Madam Pomfrey nodded.

"Yes. But you won't be if you don't do as I say. Right now, I need you to remain here. If the situation deteriorates anymore, I'll be taking you somewhere safe. Will you listen?"

Hermione nodded numbly and dropped back onto the bed. She was pregnant. With Harry's child. Tears began to fall because Harry was headed out to sacrifice himself. She curled up on the bed and began

to sob as Madam Pomfrey watched over her, sadness etched on her face. Even some wounds were beyond her ability to heal.

-X-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry blinked rapidly as the light faded. When he finally managed to see, he saw himself in Kings Cross. With curiosity, he walked toward a nearby bench and sat down, trying to figure out how he had gotten here. He did a run through in his head and realized where he was.

"Oh. I'm dead."

"Not yet, thou art."

Harry looked around him and spotted four beings walking toward him. It only took him a moment to recognize them.

"The Founders."

"Aye. Now why did thou walk out to certain death?" Helga asked.

Harry gave her a sheepish smile as Salazaar rolled his eyes.

"Typical Gryffindor. Thou lacks common sense and would tickle a sleeping dragon."

Surprisingly, Godric gave him a sour look.

"Tis Monty's fault. Fool told me that dragons could not feel a feather."

"And thou didst learn they can indeed." Rowena noted with a smile.

"Indeed. Though I could have done with out the burns." He muttered.

Harry shook his head at them.

"As much fun as this is, I have to ask if you're my guides to the afterlife."

Godric smiled as they sat down around him.

"Thou is not dead. We pulled the here to prevent thou from failing thy task."

Harry blinked in confusion before nodding.

"Since thou headed to face Voldemort with love in they heart, thou has fulfilled thy part of the prophecy. But Thy mate still has yet to fulfill her part. For everlasting darkness to be defeated, thou must be with thy mate, side by side, destroying the harbinger. Unless thou would like to cross over?" Salazaar asked.

Harry shook his head.

"No. I'd like to go back, but how can I do that?"

"I believe I can answer that."

Harry looked behind them and saw Albus Dumbledore casually walking toward him. Harry rose and walked to the man who smiled at him.

"Well done, my boy. I must say, you've come along way."

"Yeah. It hasn't been easy."

Albus nodded in understanding.

"Yes. I imagine it hasn't. But your not done yet. You see, the prophecy has been completed on your part. By sacrificing yourself to protect Miss Granger, you have made it possible to defeat the darkness. But to be finished now, you have to be there with her. She will have to kill Nagini and you will have to kill Tom. By doing this, you will finally put an end to all of this pain and misery."

Harry nodded and followed Dumbledore as the pair headed to a nearby bench, since the founders were still arguing.

"I assume you have a question."

"Yes sir. I do. Did you know this would happen?"

"Well," He began. "I won't pretend it wasn't one of the outcomes I had seen, but I had hoped it wouldn't have to happen. Especially after we destroyed the one you had in you."

"The Horcrux?" Harry asked.

Dumbledore nodded as Harry realized something.

"What would have happened if we didn't? Would I have still have to have died?"

The oldman looked uneasy.

"Well...yes. Tom would have had to kill you himself."

Harry felt a surge of anger.

"You'd have just used me as a pawn. You haven't changed. Even in death, your still a manipulative old bastard."

Dumbledore looked at the ground, sadly.

"I know I failed you Harry. And I pay for it every second."

"No." He said abruptly. "You have no idea how much suffering I been through. I will admit. You changed near the end, but a year of change doesn't erase all the years prior. You sir, have failed. I suggest you find a way to repay your inactions before we meet again. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have a war to finish."

With sheer will, Harry forced himself back to the living world.

-x-x-x-x-x-

The shack was silent as they all stared at the body of Harry Potter. Tom looked at him with an odd feeling. He'd finally killed the boy.

"Check him." He ordered.

One of his Death Eaters moved forward and confirmed that the boy had no pulse. Tom rose to his feet and sent a crucio at the body. After a minute of no response form the body, he grinned. He ordered one of his death Eaters to pick the body up and carry it up to the

castle. The precision made its way to the castle. This was going to be good.

-X-X-X-X-X-X-

Hermione was laying in the infirmary when the door were blasted open. Six Death Eaters entered and had their wands out.

"All of you are to go to the Great Hall. Now."

Hermione looked to Madam Pomfrey, who glared and headed out of the Hospital wing, all the injured following her. She looked around and saw other groups of defenders being marched to the Great Hall. She had to prevent a sob from seeing Ginny's body by one of the windows, a smoking hole between her eyes. They reached the hall where they were forced to stand as the Death Eaters lined the walls, sneering at the defenders. Hermione looked around and saw most of her friends and most of the defenders. Sirius was with Remus and Tonks, glaring at the nearest Death Eater. They'd lost. An odd sense of peace filled her.

"I'll be with you soon Harry. Both of us."

A sudden sound caught her attention and she looked toward the doors. She watched as a dozen Death Eaters entered followed by a grinning Voldemort. Once he got to the door, he beckoned more in. What she saw broke her heart. Harry's limp form was being carried into the school. Voldemort seemed to enjoy seeing everyone's shocked faces and the pined howls from Remus and Sirius. They unceremoniously dropped his body in front of the podium. Riddle stepped in front of the body and sneered over the crowd. Hermione felt the last bit of her world vanish into nothingness.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Tom sneered as he looked over the crowd. He recognized a few of the faces, but the ones he enjoyed seeing the most were Granger's, Black's, and Lupin's. It just made this all that much sweeter.

"Hogwarts have fallen. Your precious savior came and sacrificed himself for you all. He begged me to spare your lives. He begged on his knees like the disgusting blood traitor that he was. He begged

just like that mud blood whore he called a mother." He didn't finish as Sirius and Lupin lost it and charged Voldemort, wands raised.

"DIE YOU BASTARD!" They screamed, firing curse after curse.

Tom motioned for his followers to leave it to him. He cast a quick shield charm, letting their attacks bounce off of it. He sneered at them as he managed to disarm and wound both of them.

"How will you defeat me? If your lucky, I may let you live. Now where was I? Ah yes. He begged me to spare you all. It was pitiful. However, I was prepared to let you all live," The look on his face said he hadn't even considered it. "But you had to fight. I guess dear little Harry's sacrifice was in vain."

Riddle turned to look at Remus and Sirius as they tried to stand.

"You two will be the first to die. You'll see your precious friends soon."

Tom raised his wand and screams filled the room.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Hermione gripped Tonks' hand as the two women watched Sirius and women charge Voldemort, only to be disarmed and wounded. At the end of his speech, the evil man sneered at them and raised his wand. Hermione looked back from Sirius's face back to Voldemort, and what she saw made her want to cry out in happiness.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry slowly regained consciousness and could hear someone speaking. He slowly opened his eyes, blinking several times as the cold voice taunted someone. After a few seconds, he could tell who it was. Looked over to see Voldemort pointing his wand at Sirius and Lupin. Harry rose to his feet as Voldemort raised his wand. Screams greeted him as he gripped his own wand.

"I think not."

Yeah. This chapter is showing how things are coming to a head. I had to combine two chapters into one for this, so we will end this

story at nineteen chapters. I hope you liked this chapter, and yes, Voldemort channels his inner Khan in the beginning. I realize that I'm using a bit of inspiration from Star Trek. Blame the fact that I happened to be watching it while writing. Also, this chapter was inspired by Hollywood Undead. Namely the songs Young, City, and This Love, This Hate. Again, I hope you enjoyed it and remember to leave me a review.

Chapter XVII

Had Enough

Voldemort froze, his wand halfway up, as he turned his head to see Harry glaring at him, wand at the ready. Everyone seemed to stun to move as the two fighters seemed to gather their power around them. Everyone backed away and watched as the two beings began to walk counterclockwise, just glaring at each other. It was Riddle who spoke first.

"How did you survive? My Death Eaters confirmed you were dead."

Harry smirked,

"I used 'the power he knows not.' The Power of the Hogwarts four in one vessel."

He saw Riddle narrow his eyes.

"That is not possible. For I am the Heir of Slythrein." He stated smugly.

Harry snorted.

"No. Your ancestor was disowned. I am the true heir. In my veins flows the blood of the Founders. By right of conquest, you relinquished your unfounded claim when you failed to kill me."

Riddle snarled at him.

"You have no basis on that claim, half-blood."

Harry smiled.

"Just like you. After all, everyone knows that Riddle isn't a magical name. Isn't that right Tom?"

Harry could see the anger on the other man's face and knew that the final battle was close.

"I will kill you for that. Then I'll move on to your friends and their families, and so on until I purge this world of the taint that fills it. Crucio!"

Harry dived to the side, landing in a crouch as he sent a reducto at Riddle. Tom spun away and regained his aim as Harry moved on the offensive.

"Sectumsempra!"

"Protego Horribilis!"

Harry watched the curse strike the shield, but didn't wait for Voldemort to go back on the offensive.

"Incarcerous!"

Rope shot from Harry's wand, heading for Riddle. The man waved his wand, turning them into snakes and sent them at Harry.

"Fera Verto!"

The snakes that were attempting to take a bite out of Harry were turned into harmless goblets at Riddle's expense. Harry moved quickly, staying mobile so as to keep Riddle from hitting him. However, it seemed Tom had the same idea. Harry sent a tongue tying hex at Voldemort the man avoided as he sent another crucio at Harry. He barely managed to avoid it as he sent a freezing charm at the spot just in front of Voldemort. The man didn't react quickly enough and lost his balance. Harry rose to his feet and took aim.

"Diffindo!"

Harry watched the curse sail at the spot that Voldemort's neck would occupy the split second it took the spell to travel all of ten feet. Riddle's eyes widened in surprise as the curse sliced thru his neck, decapitating him. The hall was silent as Riddle hit the ground and his head rolled away from his body. Harry looked around the room as silence gripped everyone. He was searching for one person in particular and saw her. Just as he opened his mouth to call to her, he saw her eyes widen.

He spun around and saw Nagini convulsing on the ground. He had forgotten to kill the snake. With horror, he watched the final soul fragment rise out of the snake. It took the form of Voldemort's head and grinned at them.

"You haven't won yet, Potter. I-"

Whatever he was about to say was quickly silenced by Hermione.

"Expecto Patronum!"

Harry saw a bright white Doe sailed over his shoulder and slammed into the wraith. He watched in morbid fascination as the wraith screamed in pain and slowly deteriorated. After several seconds, the apparition was gone. Harry walked over to the black pool of goo on the ground and aimed at the spot.

"Skurge." He whispered, banishing the residue of Riddle's torn soul.

He felt tired suddenly as he turned back to the crowd. The Hall burst into cheers as people pushed in, trying to get a hand on him, some crying, some cheering, some doing both. Harry was getting annoyed and followed Hermione's example and set off a few noise maker spells, causing everyone to freeze in confusion. Harry looked at them and gave them an assuring smile.

"As much as I appreciate this, I'm tired, filthy, and haven't had breakfast yet. If you'll excuse me, I need to speak with a few people before I go to sleep. I can already see Madam Pomfrey making a beeline for me."

Several laughed as Harry was indeed yanked away by a scolding Madam Pomfrey. Harry just followed her and managed to see the Aurors moving the defeated Death Eaters out of the castle. It was a peaceful walk Harry mused. At least until he came around the last bend and they were greeted by the sight of Greyback, baring his fangs.

"You killed him. He was the only one who let me live. Now, I'll kill you!" He roared, moving forward.

Harry snarled and leapt forward, transforming into Shade. The pair slammed into each other, snarling. Greyback managed to throw

Shade into the wall and began shaking. Shade rose back to his feet and growled at the werewolf. If he was correct, Greyback of forcing his transformation. It was rare and could kill the werewolf in the process. That was why most simply waited until the full moon. The only good thing is that since it wasn't a normal transformation, Greyback would be weaker than he normally was. But that wasn't necessarily a good thing. Shade moved forward, snapping at Greyback. Both creatures going for a killing blow. This was how Sirius, Remus, and Hermione found them.

"Harry!" Sirius called, starting forward.

A sudden snarl from his right made him stop. He barely started to turn when a massive black panther shot forward, headed for the werewolf. Remus blinked in shock.

"She just transformed!"

Sirius wasted no time and shifted to Padfoot and leapt into the fray with a loud howl. Greyback backed up quickly, taking in his opponents. The massive wolf stood in the center with a large panther on it's right and a large grim on it's left, each of them snarling and growling at him. Deciding that the odds weren't worth it, he turned to leave. Maybe he'd bite a few kids on his way out as a form of revenge. He never got more than six feet before they were on top of him. Shade bite down on his throat as the panther leapt onto his back, massive claws rending the flesh beneath them. Greyback howled in pain as Padfoot slammed into his side, shattering the ribs on his left side. The werewolf fell to the ground, unable to rise. Shade, with a massive pull, tore out the madman's throat, spitting it on the ground in front of him. The massive shadow wolf growled at him, blood dripping from it's muzzle. Greyback made a gurgling noise as the blood began to pool around his body. It took less than a minute for him to bleed out and die. Shade slowly walked toward the Hospital wing, not bothering to change back. He was followed by the panther, leaving Sirius and Remus to watch them walk away before looking back at the corpse.

"You know. He was the one that bit me as a child."

Sirius grinned evilly and stepped forward. Remus wondered what he was doing, but didn't have to wait long before the sound of urine hitting the body reached his ears. He looked at Sirius with disbelief.

"What? I've always wanted to piss on the one who caused your problems."

Remus shrugged and joined his friend. Hell, it felt good to show Greyback how much he appreciated the bite.

-X-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry had waited until his face was cleared of the blood before he changed back and was immediately assaulted by Hermione. She look livid. He knew he was in trouble and began to try to figure out a defense.

"Mione, I- SMACK!"

Harry saw stars explode from the hit and blinked in surprise as she pulled back for a second one.

"Please. Let me-SMACK!"

From the doorway, Sirius and Remus watched as Madam Pomfrey kept organizing her potions. It was Remus who spoke first.

"Shouldn't we stop her?"

Sirius shook his head.

"Remember when Lily would do this to James? Besides, Hermione has every right to smack him. He walked out to Voldemort to die. If she wasn't hitting him now, I'd have dragged him out front and kicked his ass in full view of everyone. I still might."

Pomfrey gave a small sound of approval as Hermione reared back for a fourth slap.

"Don't - you - Mione - Me - Harry - James - Potter!"

Each slap punctuated her sentence. Harry felt his cheeks go numb as Hermione seemed to finish. She was still breathing heavy.

"How could you do that? How could you leave me? I thought you were dead!"

"Better not tell her I was." He thought as she pulled back and punched him in the stomach.

"You promised you'd never leave me! That we'd always be together! Was that just a lie so you could get into my knickers?"

Harry caught her fist and looked positively angry she'd even think that.

"How could you say that? I love you, you stubborn book worm! I walked out there to keep you alive! What does my life matter compared to your's? I'll tell you. Not a God damn thing if your gone! I didn't go out there to die for the magical world. I went out there to die for YOU."

She began to cry as he pulled her close.

"You stubborn ass! You didn't even have to consider his bluff. We'd have found a way."

Harry sighed and held her tight.

"I know. I just wanted to keep you safe. I'm sorry and I promise to never do it again. Am I forgiven?"

Hermione looked up at him and gave him a watery smile as he whipped away her tears.

"Oh no, Mister Potter. You have to work for your forgiveness. And I know just the way."

He cocked an eyebrow.

"Care to share?"

He watched her smile grow even larger.

"You can set up the nursery by yourself."

Harry blinked in confusion.

"Hermione. What are you-?"

His eyes widened as he realized what she was telling him. His face lit up as his smile threatened to split his face in half.

"Are...are you serious?" He asked.

Hermione giggled and buried her face in his chest.

"No. I'm Hermione. That's Sirius." She said as she pointed toward his godfather.

Harry lifted her face so he could keep eye contact.

"Please. Tell me. Are you?"

She nodded.

"One month today. Congratulations...Daddy."

-X-X-X-X-X-X-

Two months had passed since the Battle of Hogwarts. Harry endured as much as he could of the press and the well wishers. It only annoyed him, but it amused Hermione. Speaking of her, Harry had to smile as he looked himself over in the mirror. At the behest of her parents (And a promise as kicking from Sirius if they didn't) the pair decided to wed as soon as they could to avoid the baby being born out of wedlock. So here he stood, checking his appearance over in the mirror as Neville came in, looking amused.

"You keep tugging at your suit and you'll wear it out."

Harry gave him a mock glare.

"Quiet you. Or I'll make fun of you at your wedding."

Neville chuckled as he double checked his tie.

"You done yet?"

Harry gave a frustrated sigh as Sirius and Remus entered, both of them would be beside him with Neville as Best Man.

"If you people keep distracting me, I'll never get done."

Sirius faked hurt.

"Alas, we have been dropped to the realm of people. Mister Mooney, I do believe we are not welcome."

Remus chuckled and shifted month old Teddy slightly.

"Give it a rest Padfoot. You know how much like James Harry is."

Sirius nodded.

"True. It took James longer than Lily to get ready. And Harry is doing the same thing. This takes any longer and it'll be the groom walking down the aisle instead of the bride."

Harry sent a glare at Sirius as he walked over to them to hold Teddy.

"This is why Remus chose me as Teddy's Godfather. I'm less like to mess the kid up in the head."

Sirius faked outrage.

"You wound me! And look at what a marvelous job I did with you. An animagus. A father-to-be. A war hero. The lists go on and on."

Harry snorted and saved his retort as he headed out of the dressing room. The young Potter paused by one of the seats and greeted his cousin.

"Hey Dudley. How's your parents?" He asked.

Dudley grimaced.

"Dad's still in the hospital from his heart attack and Mum is going insane with worry. They do send their congratulations though." Harry nodded and excused himself from his cousin.

Harry joined the others by the alter and the four men took their places.

-X-X-X-X-X-X-

Hermione looked at herself nervously in the mirror as her mother fussed over her hair.

"Just think. In less than an hour, you'll become a wife. You've gown so fast." Her mother stated thickly.

Hermione turned around and hugged her mother. Both of them excited as the time came closer.

"I know. I love you Mum."

Miranda hugged her daughter as a few tears fell. Mrs. Granger pulled back and smiled lovingly at her daughter.

"You look beautiful, dear."

Hermione beamed as her father walked in. Upon seeing his daughter, he felt tears well up. His little girl was going to get married today. He felt like it was only yesterday that she was born.

"Well, I don't think I've ever seen a more beautiful bride. Well, except your mother, but I'm a bit biased." He chuckled as Luna entered.

The blonde girl smiled sweetly at her.

"You look lovely Hermione. Are you excited?"

Hermione smiled as she nodded her head, afraid to trust her voice. Luna simply beamed at her,

"Good. Your marrying your best friend. You should be excited."

Hermione shook her head, smiling.

"Luna...you really have a unique perspective."

Luna nodded.

"That's why Neville loves me so much. That and I do this thing with my tongue that-"

Jack's eyes threatened to pop out of his head as Miranda's jaw dropped. Hermione looked at Luna with alarm.

"Luna! Please! Don't finish your sentence." Hermione begged.

Luna gave her an innocent expression.

"But I can teach it to you. I bet Harry would like it."

Jack slapped his hands over his ears.

"I am not hearing this. I am not hearing this." He muttered as Miranda laughed at his expression.

Hermione meanwhile was blushing as she wondered if Harry would like a new trick.

-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry gulped as the bridal march sounded. He looked around and froze. In the front row stood a woman with long red hair and emerald green eyes, looking around the room in wonder. When her gaze fell on him, he saw her eyes widen before a smile crossed her face. Harry knew who she was and felt his eyes water momentarily before he caught sight of Hermione. And his legs felt like jelly. She was stunning in her form fitting, strapless white dress. Beside her, Jack had his face set in a neutral expression, though Harry could see the emotions swirling in his eyes. He felt Neville elbow him in the ribs.

"Breath, Harry." He said with amusement.

Harry let the breath he had been holding out as Jack and Hermione reached the alter. The official, a man who looked older than Dumbledore looked down at them through thick glasses.

"Who gives this young woman away?"

"I, Jack Edward Granger, do."

The official nodded as Harry stepped down to take Hermione's hand. Jack placed a hand on Harry's shoulder and gave him a small smile.

"Take care of my little girl Harry."

"I will, Jack."

The man turned and went to his seat next to his wife while Harry and Hermione took their places. Harry didn't know how much time had passed until he felt someone poke him in the back. Harry blinked and looked looked at the official, who seemed amused.

"I said, do you, Harry James Potter, take Hermione Granger, to be you lawfully wedded wife? In sickness and health? Till Death do you part?"

Harry sheepishly smiled as he looked back to an amused Hermione.

"I do."

The official then asked Hermione who smiled lovingly at Harry.

"I do."

He nodded and opened a small book.

"Harry, take the ring and repeat after me. 'With this ring, I thee wed.'"

Harry took the ring Neville handed him and slid it onto her ring finger, repeating the words.

"'With this ring, I thee wed.'"

"'With my body, I thee honour.'"

"'With my body, I thee honour.'"

"'And all my worldly goods with thee I share.'"

"'And all my worldly goods with thee I share.'"

"'In the name of the Father, the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.'"

"'In the name of the Father, the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.'"

Harry locked eyes with Hermione as she repeated the same lines. The official smiled and looked out over the crowd.

"You may now kiss the bride."

Harry grinned and leaned in and kissed his bride as Neville let out a wolf whistle, causing several in the audience to laugh as the newlyweds pulled apart. Harry shot Neville a mock glare as he shrugged. The official beamed at the crowd.

"Ladies and Gentleman. I present to you, Mr. and Mrs. H. J. Potter."

The room erupted into cheers as the newlyweds smiled out over the crowd.

-X-X-X-X-X-X-

Harry watched as Neville rose to his feet, the man grinning. Everyone looked up to the main table, all attention focused on him.

"Well...allow me to say that this was not an unforeseen outcome."

The crowd laughed as Neville grinned.

"As the best man, I'm supposed to tell some humorous stories and such about these two. And then go into a bit of their history. Or was it the other way around?" A few chuckles sounded out as Neville appeared to be in thought before shrugging. "Eh...I guess I'll start with history. Harry and Hermione here didn't really start off as friends. Not until a month after school started. Though...a mountain troll will do that to you."

Harry snorted.

"Yeah. But I don't recommend it." He stated amidst the laughter.

"True. Well, ever since then, they've been inseparable. Always together. Always. They didn't get together until fourth year when a certain ball was hosted for a certain tournament. They lost one of their friends who was a jealous prat, but they found something better. Love. No one was really shocked when they started dating as let's face it. They were joined at the hip since first year."

"Were not!" The two in question shouted.

Neville smirked as the crowd laughed.

"Exhibit A."

Harry shook his head as Hermione humphed.

"It was only a matter of time until we got to this point. Now, for a funny story? Let's see? Oh. Last month, Harry and a few of us guys got together for his bachelor party. We all got messed up because a certain dog kept refilling our glasses with out us realizing it. To this day, I'm still trying to figure out how Harry ended up on the roof of his house, naked, and spooning against his Firebolt."

"You swore you'd never tell!" Harry looked scandalized.

"Eh...could be worse. Sirius ended up with a pair of knickers on his head and we're still trying figure out where those came from."

The crowd laughed loudly as Sirius pouted. Neville then took on a serious face.

"But with all seriousness, Harry. You couldn't have found a more perfect person for you. You found some one who saw beyond the name and who loved you for Harry. Not for the Boy Who Lived. Hermione...we all know you the only one who can keep him on a leash and not dive right into a problem head first."

"Hey!"

"But really. Hermione. You're a wonderful person. You were kind to me when you barely knew me. Your smart and you always try to pass along your knowledge to everyone else. You bring out the best in Harry, just like he brings out the best in you. In Best Man tradition, I wish both of you the best of luck, and a long and loving marriage. My friends, make it so."

The crowd cheered as Neville sat down. Harry clapped his best friend on the back as Luna rose to her feet, her signature dreamy expression on her face.

"Hello everyone. I'm Luna, the Maid of Honor. I've known Harry and Hermione for several years now, and I have never met a more caring couple. They were kind to me when my own housemates

bullied and teased me. They taught me how to protect those I care about and how to stand up for what is right. I am honored to be here today. I don't have any humorous stories to tell because most of them have some embarrassing aspects. Like Hermione cuddled up with a bear, saying Harry's name every time she snuggled up to it. Or Harry falling down the stairs as he tried to avoid Trevor and landed on Professor Snape." The crowd was laughing hard at this point as Harry and Hermione tried hard not to laugh.

Luna smiled at her friends.

"I wish you both a long and happy marriage. May you never have a dull moment."

The crowd clapped as Luna sat back down. The rest of the night passed smoothly, except for when Fred and George had to remove Ron from the Wedding reception. He had been complaining about not being chosen as Best Man. Other than that, it was a good night.

-X-X-X-X-X-X-

Six months later...

Harry held Hermione's hand as another contraction rocked through her. He felt so useless as she screamed.

"It's okay, Mione. You're almost done. It's almost over."

"You've been saying that for the last ten hours!" She hissed at him.

Harry would have sighed but her sudden crushing force caused him to yelp in pain. Hermione seemed oblivious to it as she screamed in pain. The Doctor seemed far too cheerful for her liking.

"Keep pushing, Mrs. Potter. You're almost done."

"STOP SAYING THAT!"

Harry groaned as he felt his hand get squeezed to fine powder.

"My hand..." He moaned.

That was the wrong thing to say as Hermione whipped her head around to glare at him.

"Shut up! Your not pushing something the size of a watermelon out of you!"

Harry began to whine.

"But it hurts."

"Good!"

After another half hour, the newest Potter was welcomed to the world. At eight pounds six ounces, he was a healthy baby boy with brown hair and brown eyes. Hermione cried as she held their son while Harry looked at the baby with awe.

"We made him? He's beautiful." He whispered.

Hermione nodded and watched as her son yawned, falling asleep, his tiny hand gripping the blanket around him. She looked up at Harry and smiled.

"Yes. He is. What are we going to name him? Jonathan?" She asked.

Harry shook his head.

"No. I was thinking some thinking else. How do you like the sound of James Sirius Potter?"

She smiled at him and pulled him into a kiss.

"I like it." She looked down at the sleeping newborn. "Well, welcome to the family, James Sirius Potter. I sure Grandpa Sirius is looking forward to meeting you."

-X-X-X-X-X-

The next day, Harry woke to find Hermione up and holding James as Neville and Luna entered the room. Harry grinned as he waved to them. Luna began gushing over the baby as Neville gave him congratulations.

"Thanks. But we have something to ask you both. Hermione and I talked about it for a while and we'd like you to be James' God Parents."

Neville looked like he'd just been told that he was merlin reincarnated while Luna smiled brightly.

"I'd be honored to be his God Mother." She said as she let James grip her finger with his tiny hands.

Neville was still trying to speak.

"Blimey Harry. This is...This is big! Of course I'll do it."

Harry grinned and clapped him on the shoulder.

"Welcome to the family guys."

Yeah...I know...I said I wanted twenty chapters, but after going back over my outline, I saw that I could do the same thing in eighteen. Anyway, we have one more chapter left, and that is the epilogue. And it looks like I will be with a couple hundred words of my target length. Hope you guys have enjoyed the story and stay tuned for the final chapter. Leave me a review.

Epilogue:

Minerva McGonagall sighed as she once again looked over the scroll on her desk. Three years since he started. Already at the beginning of his third year, this student had decided to launch a prank larger than any seen since the Marauders had graced these halls. The only problem was, she couldn't find one single shred of evidence that he was to blame. The pranks were so simple in nature that most couldn't even figure them out. Complexity with simplicity. Very creative. She just hoped the tie-dye came out of her robes. Even her hat was a rainbow of colors to match her robes. Even in her tenure as Headmistress for the past thirteen years had prepared her for this student.

"Why couldn't you have taken after your mother?" She muttered.

The Headmistress looked up at the clock and watched it tick by to three. She absentmindedly wondered if he'd be late. Just as the hand hit three, there was a knock on the door. She sighed.

"At least you have your mother's punctuality." She said as she straightened her hat. "Come."

In the door stepped a young man, thirteen to be exact, with an innocent expression on his face.

"Good afternoon, Headmistress."

She nodded and pointed to the chair in front of her.

"Please. Sit. I take it you know why you're here?"

The boy shook his head, trying not to smile.

"No ma'am. Even if I had an inkling as to why, it would mean I have a guilty conscious. Since I don't, I honestly have no idea why I am here."

"Damn. She taught him logic as well."

She narrowed her eyes at him.

"So you honestly expect me to believe that you had nothing to do with the robes this morning?"

The boy feigned hurt.

"I'm wounded. I would never try to prank the Headmistress. I must say, I am hurt you'd think I stoop so low."

"Yes, I do. However, since there is not proof that you did, I cannot punish you. However, I will be keeping an eye on you, young man. Why do you have to be like your father?" She asked no one in particular.

The boy grinned cheekily.

"Because I'm the son of a Marauder. It's in my blood, ma'am."

"Cheekily little fellow aren't you?"

The boy grinned and started to rise from his seat when another knock rang through the room. This time, it was her turn to grin.

"Come in. Ah, just the two I was waiting for."

The boy slowly looked behind him and gave a nervous grin.

"Hello Mum. Dad."

His mother looked at him with seriousness while his father failed to prevent the proud grin to stay off his face.

"Don't you 'Hello Mum' me, James Sirius Potter. Your in big trouble young man."

James gulped as his father placed a hand on his shoulder, grinning.

"I'm proud of you, James. Your upholding the family tradition!"

James grinned as Hermione swatted Harry with the book in her hands.

"Harry Potter! Don't encourage him!"

Minerva shook her head as she watched them.

"Madam Potter. I thought that as a librarian, you'd avoid harming your books."

Hermione blinked in surprise, but lowered the book. It didn't stop her from swatting Harry in the shoulder as he grinned widely.

"I will trust he will be taken care of?" Minerva asked.

Hermione nodded.

"Oh yes. He will be. And don't look at me like that, James Potter. " For James had given Hermione his puppy eyes. "You left your foot print on this by using your favorite colors as the primary over lay."

James felt his jaw drop as Hermione smirked.

"I'm smarter than you are, son. Now let's go to the Library and you can help me reorganize the whole dragon section. Without magic." She added.

"But that'll take ages! Is Dad going to help?"

Harry shook his head.

"Nope. I've got a group of fifth years in Defense this period. You're on your own pal."

James pouted as Minerva rose from her seat.

"I can see that it is well taken care of. You may go Madam Potter. Professor Potter."

"Yes Headmistress."

The small family turned and left, leaving Minerva to slump back in her chair and sigh.

"I hope Miss Lily Jane Potter behaves more like her mother than father. Otherwise, I'll retire. Even Fred and George Weasley weren't this bad." She muttered as she went back to looking over papers, a slight smile on her face.

As much as she disliked those who broke the rules, she had to admit that she did like the occasional prank. One thing was certain though. If James Potter was anything like his father, they could expect great things from him. After all, Harry and Hermione Potter saved the world from Darkness. And that was indeed a great deed.

-End-

Alright. A bit of added information. Ron never fully regained the trust of Harry and Hermione. The three stopped being friends after the wedding. Neville and Luna are both married with a daughter, who James has a but of a crush on. Yes, Ginny is dead. Honestly, I never was a Ginny fan and I was going to kill her off at Bill and Fluer's wedding, but didn't know the best way to go about it. Sirius also has a child. Teddy is a year ahead of James with Lily three years younger than her older brother. She looks like Hermione, but has Harry's eyes and Hermione personality. If I do a sequal, it will involve these younger magicals taking on a new Dark Wizard. And we all know him. Oh, and Draco and his mom survived and Draco did marry Pansy and has Scorpius. Keep this on your alerts as I may add anotehr chapter with just bits of information. But for the most part, What If? is offically finished. Thank you all for staying with me til the end. I hope you enjoyed this story and keep an eye out for more. PLF saying good day, and God bless.